



ANTHONY TROLLOPE
THE CLAVERINGS
Volume II



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VOLUME II of II

EGYPTIAN PRESS

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VOLUME II

Chapter XXIX

What Would Men Say To You?

"**H**arry, tell me the truth — tell me all the truth." Harry Clavering was thus greeted when, in obedience to the summons from Lady Ongar, he went to her almost immediately on his return to London.

It will be remembered that he had remained at Clavering some days after the departure of Hugh and Archie, lacking the courage to face his misfortunes boldly. But though his delay had been cowardly, it had not been easy to him to be a coward. He despised himself for not having written with warm, full-expressed affection to Florence and with honest, clear truth to Julia. Half his misery rose from this feeling of self-abasement, and from the consciousness that he was weak, piteously weak, exactly in that in which he had often boasted to himself that he was strong. But such inward boastings are not altogether bad. They preserve men from succumbing, and make at any rate some attempt to realize themselves. The man who tells himself that he is brave, will struggle much before he flies; but the man who never does so tell himself, will find flying easy unless his heart be of nature very high. Now had come the moment either for flying or not flying; and Harry, swearing that he would stand his ground, resolutely took his hat and gloves, and made his way to Bolton Street with a sore heart.

But as he went he could not keep himself from arguing the matter within his own breast. He knew what was his duty. It was his duty to stick to Florence, not only with his word and his hand, but with his heart. It was his duty to tell Lady Ongar that, not only his word was at Stratton, but his heart also, and to ask her pardon for the wrong that he had done her by that caress. For some ten minutes as he walked through the streets his resolve was strong to do this manifest duty; but, gradually, as he thought of that caress, as he thought of the difficulties of the coming interview, as he thought of Julia's high-toned beauty — perhaps something also of her wealth and birth — and more strongly

still as he thought of her love for him, false, treacherous, selfish arguments offered themselves to his mind — arguments which he knew to be false and selfish. Which of them did he love? Could it be right for him to give his hand without his heart? Could it really be good for Florence — poor injured Florence, that she should be taken by a man who had ceased to regard her more than all other women? Were he to marry her now, would not that deceit be worse than the other deceit? Or, rather, would not that be deceitful, whereas the other course would simply be unfortunate — unfortunate through circumstances for which he was blameless? Damnable arguments! False, cowardly logic, by which all male jilts seek to excuse their own treachery to themselves and to others!

Thus during the second ten minutes of his walk, his line of conduct became less plain to him, and as he entered Piccadilly he was racked with doubts. But instead of settling them in his mind he unconsciously allowed himself to dwell upon the words with which he would seek to excuse his treachery to Florence. He thought how he would tell her — not to her face with spoken words, for that he could not do — but with written skill, that he was unworthy of her goodness, that his love for her had fallen off through his own unworthiness, and had returned to one who was in all respects less perfect than she, but who in old days, as she well knew, had been his first love. Yes! he would say all this, and Julia, let her anger be what it might, should know that he had said it. As he planned this, there came to him a little comfort, for he thought there was something grand in such a resolution. Yes; he would do that, even though he should lose Julia also.

Miserable clap-trap! He knew in his heart that all his logic was false, and his arguments baseless. Cease to love Florence Burton! He had not ceased to love her, nor is the heart of any man made so like a weathercock that it needs must turn itself hither and thither, as the wind directs, and be altogether beyond the man's control. For Harry, with all his faults, and in spite of his present falseness, was a man. No man ceases to love without a cause. No man need cease to love without a cause. A man may maintain his love, and nourish it, and keep it warm by honest, manly effort, as he may his probity, his courage, or his honor. It was not that he had ceased to love Florence; but that the glare of the candle had been too bright for him and he had scorched his wings. After all, as to that embrace of which he had thought so much, and the memory of which was so sweet to him and so bitter — it had simply been an accident. Thus, writing in his mind that letter to Florence which he knew, if he were an honest man, he would never allow himself to write,

he reached Lady Ongar's door without having arranged for himself any special line of conduct.

We must return for a moment to the fact that Hugh and Archie had returned to town before Harry Clavering. How Archie had been engaged on great doings, the reader, I hope, will remember; and he may as well be informed here that the fifty pounds was duly taken to Mount Street, and were extracted from him by the spy without much difficulty. I do not know that Archie in return obtained any immediate aid or valuable information from Sophie Gordeloup; but Sophie did obtain some information from him which she found herself able to use for her own purposes. As his position with reference to love and marriage was being discussed, and the position also of the divine Julia, Sophie hinted her fear of another Clavering lover. What did Archie think of his cousin Harry? "Why, he's engaged to another girl," said Archie, opening wide his eyes and his mouth, and becoming very free with his information. This was a matter to which Sophie found it worth her while to attend, and she soon learned from Archie all that Archie knew about Florence Burton. And this was all that could be known. No secret had been made in the family of Harry's engagement. Archie told his fair assistant that Miss Burton had been received at Clavering Park openly as Harry's future wife, and, "by Jove, you know, he can't be coming it with Julia after that, you know." Sophie made a little grimace, but did not say much. She, remembering that she had caught Lady Ongar in Harry's arms, thought that, "by Jove," he might be coming it with Julia, even after Miss Burton's reception at Clavering Park. Then, too, she remembered some few words that had passed between her and her dear Julia after Harry's departure on the evening of the embrace, and perceived that Julia was in ignorance of the very existence of Florence Burton, even though Florence had been received at the Park. This was information worth having — information to be used! Her respect for Harry rose immeasurably. She had not given him credit for so much audacity, so much gallantry, and so much skill. She had thought him to be a pigheaded Clavering, like the rest of them. He was not pigheaded; he was a promising young man; she could have liked him and perhaps aided him — only that he had shown so strong a determination to have nothing to do with her. Therefore the information should be used — and it was used.

The reader will now understand what was the truth which Lady Ongar demanded from Harry Clavering. "Harry, tell me the truth; tell me all the truth." She had come forward to meet him in the middle of the room when she spoke these words, and stood looking him in the face, not having given him her hand.

"What truth?" said Harry. "Have I ever told you a lie?" But he knew well what was the truth required of him.

"Lies can be acted as well as told. Harry, tell me all at once. Who is Florence Burton; who and what?" She knew it all, then, and things had settled themselves for him without the necessity of any action on his part. It was odd enough that she should not have learned it before, but at any rate she knew it now. And it was well that she should have been told — only how was he to excuse himself for that embrace? "At any rate speak to me," she said, standing quite erect, and looking as a Juno might have looked. "You will acknowledge at least that I have a right to ask the question. Who is this Florence Burton?"

"She is the daughter of Mr. Burton of Stratton."

"And is that all that you can tell me? Come, Harry, be braver than that. I was not such a coward once with you. Are you engaged to marry her?"

"Yes, Lady Ongar, I am."

"Then you have had your revenge on me, and now we are quits." So saying, she stepped back from the middle of the room, and sat herself down on her accustomed seat. He was left there standing, and it seemed as though she intended to take no further notice of him. He might go if he pleased, and there would be an end of it all. The difficulty would be over, and he might at once write to Florence in what language he liked. It would simply be a little episode in his life, and his escape would not have been arduous.

But he could not go from her in that way. He could not bring himself to leave the room without some further word. She had spoken of revenge. Was it not incumbent on him to explain to her that there had been no revenge; that he had loved, and suffered, and forgiven without one thought of anger — and that then he had unfortunately loved again? Must he not find some words in which to tell her that she had been the light, and he simply the poor moth that had burned his wings.

"No, Lady Ongar," said he, "there has been no revenge."

"We will call it justice, if you please. At any rate I do not mean to complain."

"If you ever injured me —" he began.

"I did injure you," said she, sharply.

"If you ever injured me, I forgave you freely."

"I did injure you —" As she spoke she rose again from her seat, showing how impossible to her was that tranquility which she had attempted to maintain. "I did injure you, but the injury came to you early in life, and sat lightly on you. Within a few months you had learned to love this young lady at the place you went to — the first young lady

you saw! I had not done you much harm, Harry. But that which you have done me cannot be undone."

"Julia," he said, coming up to her.

"No; not Julia. When you were here before I asked you to call me so, hoping, longing, believing — doing more, so much more than I could have done, but that I thought my love might now be of service to you. You do not think that I had heard of this then."

"Oh, no."

"No. It is odd that I should not have known it, as I now hear that she was at my sister's house; but all others have not been as silent as you have been. We are quits, Harry; that is all that I have to say. We are quits now."

"I have intended to be true to you — to you and to her."

"Were you true when you acted as you did the other night?" He could not explain to her how greatly he had been tempted. "Were you true when you held me in your arms as that woman came in? Had you not made me think that I might glory in loving you, and that I might show her that I scorned her when she thought to promise me her secrecy — her secrecy, as though I were ashamed of what she had seen. I was not ashamed — not then. Had all the world known it I should not have been ashamed. 'I have loved him long,' I should have said, 'and him only. He is to be my husband, and now at last I need not be ashamed.'" So much she spoke, standing up, looking at him with firm face, and uttering her syllables with a quick clear voice; but at the last word there came a quiver in her tone, and the strength of her countenance quailed, and there was a tear which made dim her eye, and she knew that she could no longer stand before him. She endeavored to seat herself with composure; but the attempt failed, and as she fell back upon the sofa he just heard the sob which had cost her so great and vain an effort to restrain. In an instant he was kneeling at her feet, and grasping at the hand with which she was hiding her face. "Julia," he said, "look at me; let us at any rate understand each other at last."

"No, Harry; there must be no more such knowledge — no more such understanding. You must go from me, and come here no more. Had it not been for that other night, I would still have endeavored to regard you as a friend. But I have no right to such friendship. I have sinned and gone astray, and am a thing vile and polluted. I sold myself as a beast is sold, and men have treated me as I treated myself."

"Have I treated you so?"

"Yes, Harry; you, you. How did you treat me when you took me in your arms and kissed me — knowing, knowing that I was not to be your wife? O God, I have sinned. I have sinned, and I am punished."

"No, no," said he, rising from his knees, "it was not as you say."

"Then how was it, sir? Is it thus that you treat other women — your friends, those to whom you declare friendship? What did you mean me to think?"

"That I loved you."

"Yes; with a love that should complete my disgrace — that should finish my degradation. But I had not heard of this Florence Burton; and, Harry, that night I was happy in my bed. And in that next week when you were down there for that sad ceremony, I was happy here, happy and proud. Yes, Harry, I was so proud when I thought you still loved me — loved me in spite of my past sin, that I almost forgot that I was polluted. You have made me remember it, and I shall not forget it again."

It would have been better for him had he gone away at once. Now he was sitting in a chair, sobbing violently, and pressing away the tears from his cheeks with his hands. How could he make her understand that he had intended no insult when he embraced her? Was it not incumbent on him to tell her that the wrong he then did was done to Florence Burton, and not to her? But his agony was too much for him at present, and he could find no words in which to speak to her.

"I said to myself that you would come when the funeral was over, and I wept for poor Hermý as I thought that my lot was so much happier than hers. But people have what they deserve, and Hermý, who has done no such wrong as I have done, is not crushed as I am crushed. It was just, Harry, that the punishment should come from you, but it has come very heavily."

"Julia, it was not meant to be so."

"Well; we will let that pass. I cannot unsay, Harry, all that I have said — all that I did not say, but which you must have thought and known when you were here last. I cannot bid you believe that I do not — love you."

"Not more tenderly or truly than I love you."

"Nay, Harry, your love to me can be neither true nor tender — nor will I permit it to be offered to me. You do not think that I would rob that girl of what is hers. Mine for you may be both tender and true; but, alas, truth has come to me when it can avail me no longer."

"Julia, if you will say that you love me, it shall avail you."

"In saying that, you are continuing to ill-treat me. Listen to me now. I hardly know when it began, for, at first, I did not expect that you would forgive me and let me be dear to you as I used to be; but as you sat here, looking up into my face in the old way, it came on me gradually — the feeling that it might be so; and I told myself that if you would

take me I might be of service to you, and I thought that I might forgive myself at last for possessing this money if I could throw it into your lap, so that you might thrive with it in the world; and I said to myself that it might be well to wait awhile, till I should see whether you really loved me; but then came that burst of passion, and though I knew that you were wrong, I was proud to feel that I was still so dear to you. It is all over. We understand each other at last, and you may go. There is nothing to be forgiven between us."

He had now resolved that Florence must go by the board. If Julia would still take him she should be his wife, and he would face Florence and all the Burtons, and his own family, and all the world in the matter of his treachery. What would he care what the world might say? His treachery to Florence was a thing completed. Now, at this moment, he felt himself to be so devoted to Julia as to make him regard his engagement to Florence as one which must, at all hazards, be renounced. He thought of his mother's sorrow, of his father's scorn — of the dismay with which Fanny would hear concerning him a tale which she would believe to be so impossible; he thought of Theodore Burton, and the deep, unquenchable anger of which that brother was capable, and of Cecilia and her outraged kindness; he thought of the infamy which would be attached to him, and resolved that he must bear it all. Even if his own heart did not move him so to act, how could he hinder himself from giving comfort and happiness to this woman who was before him? Injury, wrong, and broken-hearted wretchedness, he could not prevent; but, therefore, this part was as open to him as the other. Men would say that he had done this for Lady Ongar's money; and the indignation with which he was able to regard this false accusation — for his mind declared such accusation to be damnably false — gave him some comfort. People might say of him what they pleased. He was about to do the best within his power. Bad, alas, was the best, but it was of no avail now to think of that.

"Julia," he said, "between us at least there shall be nothing to be forgiven."

"There is nothing," said she.

"And there shall be no broken love. I am true to you now — as ever."

"And, what, then, of your truth to Miss Florence Burton?"

"It will not be for you to rebuke me with that. We have, both of us, played our game badly, but not for that reason need we both be ruined and broken-hearted. In your folly you thought that wealth was better than love; and I, in my folly — I thought that one love blighted might be mended by another. When I asked Miss Burton to be my wife you

were the wife of another man. Now that you are free again I cannot marry Miss Burton."

"You must marry her, Harry."

"There shall be no must in such a case. You do not know her, and cannot understand how good, how perfect she is. She is too good to take a hand without a heart."

"And what would men say of you?"

"I must bear what men say. I do not suppose that I shall be all happy — not even with your love. When things have once gone wrong they cannot be mended without showing the patches. But yet men stay the hand of ruin for a while, tinkering here and putting in a nail there, stitching and cobbling; and so things are kept together. It must be so for you and me. Give me your hand, Julia, for I have never deceived you, and you need not fear that I shall do so now. Give me your hand, and say that you will be my wife."

"No, Harry; not your wife. I do not, as you say, know that perfect girl, but I will not rob one that is so good."

"You are bound to me, Julia. You must do as I bid you. You have told me that you love me; and I have told you — and I tell you now, that I love none other as I love you — have never loved any other as I loved you. Give me your hand." Then, coming to her, he took her hand, while she sat with her face averted from him. "Tell me that you will be my wife." But she would not say the words. She was less selfish than he, and was thinking — was trying to think what might be best for them all, but, above all, what might be best for him. "Speak to me," he said, "and acknowledge that you wronged me when you thought that the expression of my love was an insult to you."

"It is easy to say, speak. What shall I say?"

"Say that you will be my wife."

"No — I will not say it." She rose again from her chair, and took her hand away from him. "I will not say it. Go now and think over all that you have done; and I also will think of it. God help me. What evil comes when evil has been done. But, Harry, I understand you now, and I at least will blame you no more. Go and see Florence Burton; and if when you see her, you find that you can love her, take her to your heart, and be true to her. You shall never hear another reproach from me. Go now, go; there is nothing more to be said."

He paused a moment as though he were going to speak, but he left the room without another word. As he went along the passage and turned on the stairs he saw her standing at the door of the room, looking at him, and it seemed that her eyes were imploring him to be true to her in spite of the words that she had spoken. "And I will be true to

her," he said to himself. "She was the first that I ever loved, and I will be true to her."

He went out, and for an hour or two wandered about the town, hardly knowing whither his steps were taking him. There had been a tragic seriousness in what had occurred to him this evening, which seemed to cover him with care, and make him feel that his youth was gone from him. At any former period of his life his ears would have tingled with pride to hear such a woman as Lady Ongar speak of her love for him in such terms as she had used; but there was no room now for pride in his bosom. Now at least he thought nothing of her wealth or rank. He thought of her as a woman between whom and himself there existed so strong a passion as to make it impossible that he should marry another, even though his duty plainly required it. The grace and graciousness of his life were over; but love still remained to him, and of that he must make the most. All others whom he regarded would revile him, and now he must live for this woman alone. She had said that she had injured him. Yes, indeed, she had injured him! She had robbed him of his high character, of his unclouded brow, of that self-pride which had so often told him that he was living a life without reproach among men. She had brought him to a state in which misery must be his bedfellow, and disgrace his companion; but still she loved him, and to that love he would be true.

And as to Florence Burton — how was he to settle matters with her? That letter for which he had been preparing the words as he went to Bolton Street, before the necessity for it had become irrevocable, did not now appear to him to be very easy. At any rate he did not attempt it on that night.

Chapter XXX

The Man Who Dusted His Boots With His Handkerchief

When Florence Burton had written three letters to Harry without receiving a word in reply to either of them, she began to be seriously unhappy. The last of these letters, received by him after the scene described in the last chapter, he had been afraid to read. It still remained unopened in his pocket. But Florence, though she was unhappy, was not even yet jealous. Her fears did not lie in that direction, nor had she naturally any tendency to such uneasiness. He was ill, she thought; or if not ill in health, then ill at ease. Some trouble afflicted him of which he could not bring himself to tell her the facts, and as she thought of this she remembered her own stubbornness on the subject of their marriage, and blamed herself in that she was not now with him, to comfort him. If such comfort would avail him anything now, she would be stubborn no longer. When the third letter brought no reply she wrote to her sister-in-law, Mrs. Burton, confessing her uneasiness, and begging for comfort. Surely Cecilia could not but see him occasionally — or at any rate have the power of seeing him. Or Theodore might do so — as, of course, he would be at the office. If anything ailed him would Cecilia tell her all the truth? But Cecilia, when she began to fear that something did ail him, did not find it very easy to tell Florence all the truth.

But there was jealousy at Stratton, though Florence was not jealous. Old Mrs. Burton had become alarmed, and was ready to tear the eyes out of Harry Clavinger's head if Harry should be false to her daughter. This was a misfortune of which, with all her brood, Mrs. Burton had as yet known nothing. No daughter of hers had been misused by any man, and no son of hers had ever misused anyone's daughter. Her children had gone out into the world steadily, prudently, making no brilliant marriages, but never falling into any mistakes. She heard of such misfortunes around her — that a young lady here had loved in vain, and that a young lady there had been left to wear the willow; but such sorrows had never visited her roof; and she was disposed to think — and

perhaps to say — that the fault lay chiefly in the imprudence of mothers. What if at last, when her work in this line had been so nearly brought to a successful close, misery and disappointment should come also upon her lamb! In such case Mrs. Burton, we may say, was a ewe who would not see her lamb suffer without many bleatings and considerable exercise of her maternal energies.

And tidings had come to Mrs. Burton which had not as yet been allowed to reach Florence's ears. In the office at the Adelphi was one Mr. Walliker, who had a younger brother now occupying that desk in Mr. Burton's office which had belonged to Harry Clavering. Through Bob Walliker Mrs. Burton learned that Harry did not come to the office even when it was known that he had returned to London from Clavering — and she also learned at last that the young men in the office were connecting Harry Clavering's name with that of a rich and noble widow, Lady Ongar. Then Mrs. Burton wrote to her son Theodore, as Florence had written to Theodore's wife.

Mrs. Burton, though she had loved Harry dearly, and had, perhaps, in many respects liked him better than any of her sons-in-law, had, nevertheless, felt some misgivings from the first. Florence was brighter, better educated and cleverer than her elder sisters, and therefore when it had come to pass that she was asked in marriage by a man somewhat higher in rank and softer in manners than they who had married her sisters, there had seemed to be some reason for the change — but Mrs. Burton had felt that it was a ground for apprehension. High rank and soft manners may not always belong to a true heart. At first she was unwilling to hint this caution even to herself; but at last, as her suspicions grew, she spoke the words very frequently, not only to herself, but also to her husband. Why, oh why, had she let into her house any man differing in mode of life from those whom she had known to be honest and good? How would her grey hairs be made to go in sorrow to the grave, if after all her old prudence and all her old success, her last pet lamb should be returned to the mother's side, ill-used, maimed, and blighted!

Theodore Burton, when he received his mother's letter, had not seen Harry since his return from Clavering. He had been inclined to be very angry with him for his long and unannounced absence from the office. "He will do no good," he had said to his wife. "He does not know what real work means." But his anger turned to disgust as regarded Harry, and almost to despair as regarded his sister, when Harry had been a week in town and yet had not shown himself at the Adelphi. But at this time Theodore Burton had heard no word of Lady Ongar, though the clerks in the office had that name daily in their mouths. "Cannot you go to

him, Theodore?" said his wife. "It is very easy to say go to him," he replied. "If I made it my business I could, of course, go to him, and no doubt find him if I was determined to do so — but what more could I do? I can lead a horse to the water, but I cannot make him drink." "You could speak to him of Florence." "That is such a woman's idea," said the husband. "When every proper incentive to duty and ambition has failed him, he is to be brought into the right way by the mention of a girl's name!" "May I see him?" Cecilia urged. "Yes — if you can catch him; but I do not advise you to try."

After that came the two letters for the husband and wife, each of which was shown to the other; and then for the first time did either of them receive the idea that Lady Ongar with her fortune might be a cause of misery to their sister. "I don't believe a word of it," said Cecilia, whose cheeks were burning, half with shame and half with anger. Harry had been such a pet with her — had already been taken so closely to her heart as a brother! "I should not have suspected him of that kind of baseness," said Theodore, very slowly. "He is not base," said Cecilia. "He may be idle and foolish, but he is not base."

"I must at any rate go after him now," said Theodore. "I don't believe this — I won't believe it. I do not believe it. But if it should be true —!"

"Oh, Theodore."

"I do not think it is true. It is not the kind of weakness I have seen in him. He is weak and vain, but I should have said that he was true."

"I am sure he is true."

"I think so. I cannot say more than that I think so."

"You will write to your mother?"

"Yes."

"And may I ask Florence to come up? Is it not always better that people should be near to each other when they are engaged?"

"You can ask her, if you like. I doubt whether she will come."

"She will come if she thinks that anything is amiss with him."

Cecilia wrote immediately to Florence, pressing her invitation in the strongest terms that she could use. "I tell you the whole truth," she said. "We have not seen him, and this of course, has troubled us very greatly. I feel quite sure he would come to us if you were here; and this, I think, should bring you, if no other consideration does so. Theodore imagines that he has become simply idle, and that he is ashamed to show himself here because of that. It may be that he has some trouble with reference to his own home, of which we know nothing. But if he has any such trouble you ought to be made aware of it, and I feel sure that he would tell you if you were here." Much more she said, arguing in the same way, and pressing Florence to come to London.

Mr. Burton did not at once send a reply to his mother, but he wrote the following note to Harry:

ADELPHI — May, 186—

My Dear Clavering: —

I have been sorry to notice your continued absence from the office, and both Cecilia and I have been very sorry that you have discontinued coming to us. But I should not have written to you on this matter, not wishing to interfere in your own concerns, had I not desired to see you specially with reference to my sister. As I have that to say to you concerning her which I can hardly write, will you make an appointment with me here; or at my house? Or, if you cannot do that, will you say when I shall find you at home? If you will come and dine with us we shall like that best, and leave you to name an early day; tomorrow, or the next day, or the day after. "Very truly yours,

"THEODORE BURTON"

When Cecilia's letter reached Stratton, and another post came without any letter from Harry, poor Florence's heart sank low in her bosom. "Well, my dear," said Mrs. Burton, who watched her daughter anxiously while she was reading the letter. Mrs. Burton had not told Florence of her own letter to her son; and now, having herself received no answer, looked to obtain some reply from that which her daughter-in-law had sent.

"Cecilia wants me to go to London," said Florence.

"Is there anything the matter that you should go just now?"

"Not exactly the matter, mamma; but you can see the letter."

Mrs. Burton read it slowly, and felt sure that much was the matter. She knew that Cecilia would have written in that strain only under the influence of some great alarm. At first she was disposed to think that she herself would go to London. She was eager to know the truth — eager to utter her loud maternal bleatings if any wrong were threatened to her lamb. Florence might go with her, but she longed herself to be on the field of action. She felt that she could almost annihilate any man by her words and looks who would dare to ill-treat a girl of hers.

"Well, mamma — what do you think?"

"I don't know yet, my dear. I will speak to your papa before dinner." But as Mrs. Burton had been usually autocratic in the management of her own daughters, Florence was aware that her mother simply required a little time before she made up her mind. "It is not that I want to go London for the pleasure of it, mamma."

"I know that, my dear."

"Nor yet merely to see him! — though, of course, I do long to see him!"

"Of course you do — why shouldn't you?"

"But Cecilia is so very prudent, and she thinks that it will be better. And she would not have pressed it, unless Theodore had thought so too!"

"I thought Theodore would have written to me!"

"But he writes so seldom."

"I expected a letter from him now, as I had written to him."

"About Harry, do you mean?"

"Well; yes. I did not mention it, as I was aware I might make you uneasy. But I saw that you were unhappy at not hearing from him."

"Oh, mamma, do let me go."

"Of course you shall go if you wish it; but let me speak to papa before anything is quite decided."

Mrs. Burton did speak to her husband, and it was arranged that Florence should go up to Onslow Crescent. But Mrs. Burton, though she had been always autocratic about her unmarried daughters, had never been autocratic about herself. When she hinted that she also might go, she saw that the scheme was not approved, and she at once abandoned it.

"It would look as if we were all afraid," said Mr. Burton; "and, after all, what does it come to? A young gentleman does not write to his sweetheart for two or three weeks. I used to think myself the best lover in the world if I wrote once a month."

"There was no penny post then, Mr. Burton."

"And I often wish there was none now," said Mr. Burton. That matter was therefore decided, and Florence wrote back to her sister-in-law, saying that she would go up to London on the third day from that. In the meantime, Harry Clavering and Theodore Burton had met.

Has it ever been the lot of any unmarried male reader of these pages to pass three or four days in London, without anything to do — to have to get through them by himself — and to have that burden on his shoulder, with the additional burden of some terrible, wearing misery, away from which there seems to be no road, and out of which there is apparently no escape? That was Harry Clavering's condition for some few days after the evening which he last passed in the company of Lady Ongar; and I will ask any such unmarried man whether, in such a plight, there was for him any other alternative but to wish himself dead? In such a condition, a man can simply walk the streets by himself, and declare to himself that everything is bad, and rotten, and vile, and

worthless. He wishes himself dead, and calculates the different advantages of prussic acid and pistols. He may the while take his meals very punctually at his club, may smoke his cigars, and drink his bitter beer, or brandy-and-water; but he is all the time wishing himself dead, and making that calculation as to the best way of achieving that desirable result. Such was Harry Clavering's condition now. As for his office, the doors of that place were absolutely closed against him, by the presence of Theodore Burton. When he attempted to read, he could not understand a word, or sit for ten minutes with a book in his hand. No occupation was possible to him. He longed to go again to Bolton Street, but he did not even do that. If there, he could act only as though Florence had been deserted forever; and if he so acted, he would be infamous for life. And yet he had sworn to Julia that such was his intention. He hardly dared to ask himself which of the two he loved. The misery of it all had become so heavy upon him, that he could take no pleasure in the thought of his love. It must always be all regret, all sorrow, and all remorse. Then there came upon him the letter from Theodore Burton, and he knew that it was necessary that he should see the writer.

Nothing could be more disagreeable than such an interview, but he could not allow himself to be guilty of the cowardice of declining it. Of a personal quarrel with Burton he was not afraid. He felt, indeed, that he might almost find relief in the capability of being himself angry with anyone. But he must positively make up his mind before such an interview. He must devote himself either to Florence or to Julia; and he did not know how to abandon the one or the other. He had allowed himself to be so governed by impulse that he had pledged himself to Lady Ongar, and had sworn to her that he would be entirely hers. She, it is true, had not taken him altogether at his word, but not the less did he know — did he think that he knew — that she looked for the performance of his promise. And she had been the first that he had sworn to love!

In his dilemma he did at last go to Bolton Street, and there found that Lady Ongar had left town for three or four days. The servant said that she had gone, he believed, to the Isle of Wight; and that Madam Gordeloup had gone with her. She was to be back in town early in the following week. This was on a Thursday, and he was aware that he could not postpone his interview with Burton till after Julia's return. So he went to his club, and nailing himself as it were to the writing-table, made an appointment for the following morning. He would be with Burton at the Adelphi at twelve o'clock. He had been in trouble, he said, and that trouble had kept him from the office and from Onslow Crescent.

Having written this, he sent it off, and then played billiards, and smoked, and dined, played more billiards, and smoked and drank till the usual hours of the night had come. He was not a man who liked such things. He had not become what he was by passing his earlier years after this fashion. But his misery required excitement, and, billiards, with tobacco, were better than the desolation of solitude.

On the following morning he did not breakfast till near eleven. Why should he get up as long as it was possible to obtain the relief which was to be had from dozing? As far as possible he would not think of the matter till he had put his hat upon his head to go to The Adelphi. But the time for taking his hat soon came, and he started on his short journey. But even as he walked, he could not think of it. He was purposeless, as a ship without a rudder, telling himself that he could only go as the winds might direct him. How he did hate himself for his one weakness! And yet he hardly made an effort to overcome it. On one point only did he seem to have a resolve. If Burton attempted to use with him anything like a threat, he would instantly resent it.

Punctually at twelve he walked into the outer office, and was told that Mr. Burton was in his room.

"Halloa, Clavering," said Walliker, who was standing with his back to the fire, "I thought we had lost you for good and all. And here you are come back again!"

Harry had always disliked this man, and now hated him worse than ever. "Yes; I am here," said he, "for a few minutes; but I believe I need not trouble you."

"All right, old fellow," said Walliker; and then Harry passed through into the inner room.

"I am very glad to see you, Harry," said Burton, rising, and giving his hand cordially to Clavering. "And I am sorry to hear that you have been in trouble. Is it anything in which we can help you?"

"I hope — Mrs. Burton is well," said Harry, hesitating.

"Pretty well."

"And the children?"

"Quite well. They say you are a very bad fellow not to go and see them."

"I believe I am a bad fellow," said Harry.

"Sit down, Harry. It will be best to come at the point at once; will it not? Is there anything wrong between you and Florence?"

"What do you mean by wrong?"

"I should call it very wrong — hideously wrong — if, after all that has passed between you, there should now be any doubt as to your affection

for each other. If such doubt were now to arise with her, I should almost disown my sister."

"You will never have to blush for her."

"I think not. I thank God that hitherto there have been no such blushes among us. And I hope, Harry, that my heart may never have to bleed for her. Come, Harry, let me tell you all at once like an honest man. I hate subterfuges and secrets. A report has reached the old people at home — not Florence, mind — that you are untrue to Florence, and are passing your time with that lady who is the sister of your cousin's wife."

"What right have they to ask how I pass my time?"

"Do not be unjust, Harry. If you simply tell me that your visits to that lady imply no evil to my sister, I, knowing you to be a gentleman, will take your word for all that it can mean." He paused, and Harry hesitated, and could not answer. "Nay, dear friend — brother as we both of us have thought you — come once more to Onslow Crescent and kiss the bairns, and kiss Cecilia, too, and sit with us at our table, and talk as you used to do, and I will ask no further question; nor will she. Then you will come back here to your work, and your trouble will be gone, and your mind will be at ease; and, Harry, one of the best girls that ever gave her heart into a man's keeping will be there to worship you, and to swear when your back is turned that anyone who says a word against you shall be no brother, and no sister, and no friend of hers."

And this was the man who had dusted his boots with his pocket-handkerchief and whom Harry had regarded as being, on that account, hardly fit to be his friend! He knew that the man was noble, and good, and generous, and true; and knew also that in all that Burton said he simply did his duty as a brother. But not on that account was it the easier for him to reply.

"Say that you will come to us this evening," said Burton. "Even if you have an engagement, put it off."

"I have none," said Harry.

"Then say that you will come to us, and all will be well."

Harry understood of course that his compliance with this invitation would be taken as implying that all was right. It would be so easy to accept the invitation, and any other answer was so difficult! But yet he would not bring himself to tell the lie.

"Burton," he said, "I am in trouble."

"What is the trouble?" The man's voice was now changed, and so was the glance of his eye. There was no expression of anger — none as yet; but the sweetness of his countenance was gone — a sweetness that was

unusual to him, but which still was at his command when he needed it.

"I cannot tell you all here. If you will let me come to you this evening I will tell you everything — you and to Cecilia too. Will you let me come?"

"Certainly. Will you dine with us?"

"No; after dinner; when the children are in bed." Then he went, leaving on the mind of Theodore Burton an impression that though something was much amiss, his mother had been wrong in her fears respecting Lady Ongar.

Chapter XXXI

Freshwater Gate

COUNT Pateroff, Sophie's brother, was a man who, when he had taken a thing in hand, generally liked to carry it through. It may perhaps be said that most men are of this turn of mind; but the count was, I think, especially eager in this respect. And as he was not one who had many irons in the fire, who made either many little efforts, or any great efforts after things altogether beyond his reach, he was justified in expecting success. As to Archie's courtship, anyone who really knew the man and the woman, and who knew anything of the nature of women in general, would have predicted failure for him. Even with Doodle's aid he could not have a chance in the race. But when Count Pateroff entered himself for the same prize, those who knew him would not speak of his failure as a thing certain.

The prize was too great not to be attempted by so very prudent a gentleman. He was less impulsive in his nature than his sister, and did not open his eyes and talk with watering mouth of the seven thousands of pounds a year; but in his quiet way he had weighed and calculated all the advantages to be gained, had even ascertained at what rate he could insure the lady's life, and had made himself certain that nothing

in the deed of Lord Ongar's marriage-settlement entailed any pecuniary penalty on his widow's second marriage. Then he had gone down, as we know, to Ongar Park, and as he had walked from the lodge to the house and back again, he had looked around him complacently, and told himself that the place would do very well. For the English character, in spite of the pigheadedness of many Englishmen, he had — as he would have said himself — much admiration, and he thought that the life of a country gentleman, with a nice place of his own — with such a very nice place of his own as was Ongar Park — and so very nice an income, would suit him well in his declining years.

And he had certain advantages, certain aids toward his object, which had come to him from circumstances; as, indeed, he had also certain disadvantages. He knew the lady, which was in itself much. He knew much of the lady's history, and had that cognizance of the saddest circumstances of her life, which in itself creates an intimacy. It is not necessary now to go back to those scenes which had disfigured the last months of Lord Ongar's life, but the reader will understand that what had then occurred gave the count a possible footing as a suitor. And the reader will also understand the disadvantages which had at this time already shown themselves in the lady's refusal to see the count.

It may be thought that Sophie's standing with Lady Ongar would be a great advantage to her brother; but I doubt whether the brother trusted either the honesty or the discretion of his sister. He would have been willing to purchase such assistance as she might give — not in Archie's pleasant way, with bank-notes hidden under his glove — but by acknowledgments for services to be turned into solid remuneration when the marriage should have taken place, had he not feared that Sophie might communicate the fact of such acknowledgments to the other lady — making her own bargain in doing so. He had calculated all this, and had come to the conclusion that he had better make no direct proposal to Sophie; and when Sophie made a direct proposal to him, pointing out to him in glowing language all the fine things which such a marriage would give him, he had hardly vouchsafed to her a word of answer. "Very well," said Sophie to herself; "very well. Then we both know what we are about."

Sophie herself would have kept Lady Ongar from marrying anyone had she been able. Not even a brother's gratitude would be so serviceable to her as the generous kindness of a devoted friend. That she might be able both to sell her services to a lover, and also to keep Julie from marrying, was a lucky combination of circumstances which did not occur to her till Archie came to her with the money in his glove. That complicated game she was now playing, and was aware that Harry

Clavering was the great stumbling-block in her way. A woman even less clever than Sophie would have perceived that Lady Ongar was violently attached to Harry; and Sophie, when she did see it, thought that there was nothing left for her but to make her hay while the sun was yet shining. Then she heard the story of Florence Burton; and again she thought that Fortune was on her side. She told the story of Florence Burton — with what result we know; and was quite sharp enough to perceive afterward that the tale had had its intended effect — even though her Julie had resolutely declined to speak either of Harry Clavering or of Florence Burton.

Count Pateroff had again called in Bolton Street, and had again been refused admittance. It was plain to him to see by the servant's manner that it was intended that he should understand that he was not to be admitted. Under such circumstances, it was necessary that he must either abandon his pursuit, or that he must operate upon Lady Ongar through some other feeling than her personal regard for himself. He might, perhaps, have trusted much to his own eloquence if he could have seen her; but how is a man to be eloquent in his wooing if he cannot see the lady whom he covets? There is, indeed, the penny post, but in these days of legal restraints, there is no other method of approaching an unwilling beauty. Forcible abduction is put an end to as regards Great Britain and Ireland. So the count had resort to the post.

His letter was very long, and shall not, therefore, be given to the reader. He began by telling Lady Ongar that she owed it to him for the good services he had done her, to read what he might say, and to answer him. He then gave her various reasons why she should see him, pleading, among other things, in language which she could understand, though the words were purposely as ambiguous as they could be made, that he had possessed and did possess the power of doing her a grievous injury, and that he had abstained, and — hoped that he might be able to abstain for the future. She knew that the words contained no threat — that taken literally they were the reverse of a threat, and amounted to a promise — but she understood also that he had intended to imply. Long as his own letter was, he said nothing in it as to his suit, confining himself to a request that she should see him. But with his letter he sent her an enclosure longer than the letter itself in which his wishes were clearly explained.

This enclosure purported to be an expression of Lord Ongar's wishes on many subjects, as they had been communicated to Count Pateroff in the latter days of the lord's life; but as the manuscript was altogether in the count's writing, and did not even pretend to have been subjected to Lord Ongar's eye, it simply amounted to the count's own story of

their alleged conversations. There might have been no such conversations, or their tenor might have been very different from that which the count represented, or the statements and opinions, if expressed at all by Lord Ongar, might have been expressed at times when no statements or opinions coming from him could be of any value. But as to these conversations, if they could have been verified as having come from Lord Ongar's mouth when he was in full possession of such faculties as he possessed — all that would have amounted to nothing with Lady Ongar. To Lord Ongar alive she had owed obedience, and had been obedient. To Lord Ongar dead she owed no obedience, and would not be obedient.

Such would have been her feelings as to any document which could have reached her, purporting to contain Lord Ongar's wishes; but this document was of a nature which made her specially antagonistic to the exercise of any such marital authority from the grave. It was very long, and went into small details — details which were very small; but the upshot of it all was a tendering of great thanks to Count Pateroff, and the expression of a strong wish that the count should marry his widow. "O. said that this would be the only thing for J.'s name." "O. said that this would be the safest course for his own honor." "O. said, as he took my hand, that in promising to take this step I gave him great comfort." "O. commissioned me to speak to J. in his name to this effect." The O. was, of course, Lord Ongar, and the J. was, of course, Julia. It was all in French, and went on in the same strain for many pages. Lady Ongar answered the letter as follows:

Lady Ongar presents her compliments to Count Pateroff, and begs to return the enclosed manuscript, which is, to her, perfectly valueless. Lady Ongar must still decline, and now more strongly than before, to receive Count Pateroff.

BOLTON STREET, May, 186—

She was quite firm as she did this. She had no doubt at all on the matter. She did not feel that she wanted to ask for any advice. But she did feel that this count might still work her additional woe, that her cup of sorrow might not even yet be full, and that she was sadly — sadly in want of love and protection. For aught she knew, the count might publish the whole statement, and people might believe that those words came from her husband, and that her husband had understood what would be best for her fame and for his honor. The whole thing was a threat, and not to save herself from any misery, would she have suc-

cumbed to a menace; but still it was possible that the threat might be carried out.

She was sorely in want of love and protection. At this time, when the count's letter reached her, Harry had been with her; and we know what had passed between them. She had bid him go to Florence, and love Florence, and marry Florence, and leave her in her desolation. That had been her last command to him. But we all know what such commands mean. She had not been false in giving him these orders. She had intended it at the moment. The glow of self-sacrifice had been warm in her bosom, and she had resolved to do without that which she wanted, in order that another might have it. But when she thought of it afterward in her loneliness, she told herself that Florence Burton could not want Harry's love as she wanted it. There could not be such need to this girl, who possessed father and mother, and brothers, and youth, as there was to her, who had no other arm on which she could lean, beside that of the one man for whom she had acknowledged her love, and who had also declared his passion for her. She made no scheme to deprive Florence of her lover. In the long hours of her own solitude she never revoked, even within her own bosom, the last words she had said to Harry Clavering. But not the less did she hope that he might come to her again, and that she might learn from him that he had freed himself from that unfortunate engagement into which her falseness to him had driven him.

It was after she had answered Count Pateroff's letter that she resolved to go out of town for three or four days. For some short time she had been minded to go away altogether, and not to return till after the Autumn; but this scheme gradually diminished itself and fell away, till she determined that she would come back after three or four days. Then came to her Sophie — her devoted Sophie — Sophie whom she despised and hated; Sophie of whom she was so anxious to rid herself that in all her plans there was some little under-plot to that effect; Sophie whom she knew to be dishonest to her in any way that might make dishonesty profitable; and before Sophie had left her, Sophie had engaged herself to go with her dear friend to the Isle of Wight! As a matter of course, Sophie was to be franked on this expedition. On such expeditions Sophies are always franked, as a matter of course. And Sophie would travel with all imaginable luxury — a matter to which Sophie was by no means indifferent, though her own private life was conducted with an economy that was not luxurious. But, although all these good things came in Sophie's way, she contrived to make it appear that she was devoting herself in a manner that was almost sacrificial to the friend of her bosom. At the same time Lady Ongar sent a few words, as a message,

to the count by his sister. Lady Ongar, having told to Madam Gordeloup the story of the document which had reached her, and having described her own answer, was much commended by her friend.

"You are quite right, dear, quite. Of course I am fond of my brother. Edouard and I have always been the best of friends. But that does not make me think you ought to give yourself to him. Bah! Why should a woman give away everything? Edouard is a fine fellow. But what is that? Fine fellows like to have all the money themselves."

"Will you tell him — from me," said Lady Ongar, "that I will take it as a kindness on his part if he will abstain from coming to my house. I certainly shall not see him with my own consent."

Sophie promised, and probably gave the message; but when she also informed Edouard of Lady Ongar's intended visit to the Isle of Wight, telling him the day on which they were going and the precise spot, with the name of the hotel at which they were to stay, she went a little beyond the commission which her dearest friend had given her.

At the western end of the Isle of Wight, and on the further shore, about three miles from the point of the island which we call the Needles, there is a little break in the cliff, known to all the stay-at-home English travelers as Freshwater Gate. Here there is a cluster of cottages and two inns, and a few bathing-boxes, and ready access by easy ascents to the breezy downs on either side, over which the sea air blows with all its salt and wholesome sweetness. At one of these two inns Lady Ongar located herself and Sophie; and all Freshwater, and all Yarmouth, and all that end of the Island were alive to the fact that the rich widowed countess respecting whom such strange tales were told, had come on a visit to these parts. Innkeepers like such visitors. The more venomous are the stories told against them, the more money are they apt to spend, and the less likely are they to examine their hills. A rich woman altogether without a character is a mine of wealth to an innkeeper. In the present case no such godsend had come in the way — but there was supposed to be a something a little odd, and the visitor was on that account the more welcome.

Sophie was not the most delightful companion in the world for such a place. London was her sphere, as she herself had understood when declaiming against those husbands who keep their wives in the country. And she had no love for the sea specially, regarding all winds as nuisances excepting such as had been raised by her own efforts, and thinking that salt from a saltcellar was more convenient than that brought to her on the breezes. It was now near the end of May, but she had not been half an hour at the inn before she was loud in demanding a fire — and when the fire came she was unwilling to leave it. Her gesture

was magnificent when Lady Ongar proposed to her that she should bathe. What — put her own dear little dry body, by her own will, into the cold sea! She shrugged herself, and shook herself, and without speaking a word declined with so much eloquence that it was impossible not to admire her. Nor would she walk. On the first day, during the warmest part of the day, she allowed herself to be taken out in a carriage belonging to the inn; but after her drive she clung to the fire, and consumed her time with a French novel.

Nor was Lady Ongar much more comfortable in the Isle of Wight than she had been in London. The old poet told us how Black Care sits behind the horseman, and some modern poet will some day describe to us that terrible goddess as she takes her place with the stoker close to the fire of the locomotive engine. Sitting with Sophie opposite to her, Lady Ongar was not happy, even though her eye rested on the lines of that magnificent coast. Once indeed, on the evening of their first day, Sophie left her, and she was alone for nearly an hour. Ah, how happy could she have been if Harry Clavering might have been there with her. Perhaps a day might come in which Harry might bring her there. In such a case *Atra Cura* would be left behind, and then she might be altogether happy. She sat dreaming of this for above an hour, and Sophie was still away. When Sophie returned, which she did all too soon, she explained that she had been in her bedroom. She had been very busy, and now had come down to make herself comfortable.

On the next evening Lady Ongar declared her intention of going up on the downs by herself. They had dined at five, so that she might have a long evening, and soon after six she started. "If I do not break down I will get as far as the Needles," she said. Sophie, who had heard that the distance was three miles, lifted up her hands in despair. "If you are not back before nine I shall send the people after you." Consenting to this with a laugh, Lady Ongar made her way up to the downs, and walked steadily on toward the extreme point of the island. To the Needles themselves she did not make her way. These rocks are now approached, as all the stay-at-home travelers know, through a fort, and down to the fort she did not go. But turning a little from the highest point of the hill toward the cliffs on her left hand, she descended till she reached a spot from which she could look down on the pebbly beach lying some three hundred feet below her, and on the soft shining ripple of the quiet waters as they moved themselves with a pleasing sound on the long strand which lay stretched in a line from the spot beneath her out to the point of the island. The evening was warm, and almost transparent in its clearness, and very quiet. There was no sound even of a breeze. When she seated herself close upon the margin of the cliff, she heard

the small waves moving the stones which they washed, and the sound was as the sound of little children's voices, very distant. Looking down, she could see through the wonderful transparency of the water, and the pebbles below it were bright as diamonds, and the sands were burnished like gold. And each tiny silent wavelet as it moved up toward the shore and lost itself at last in its own effort, stretched itself the whole length of the strand. Such brightness on the seashore she had never seen before, nor had she ever listened as now she listened to that infantine babble of the baby waves. She sat there close upon the margin, on a seat of chalk which the winds had made, looking, listening, and forgetting for a while that she was Lady Ongar whom people did not know, who lived alone in the world with Sophie Gordeloup for her friend — and whose lover was betrothed to another woman. She had been there perhaps half an hour, and had learned to be at home on her perch, sitting there in comfort, with no desire to move, when a voice which she well knew at the first sound startled her, and she rose quickly to her feet. "Lady Ongar," said the voice, "are you not rather near the edge?" As she turned round there was Count Pateroff with his hand already upon her dress, so that no danger might be produced by the suddenness of his speech.

"There is nothing to fear," she said, stepping back from her seat. As she did so, he dropped his hand from her dress, and, raising it to his head, lifted his hat from his forehead. "You will excuse me, I hope, Lady Ongar," he said, "for having taken this mode of speaking to you."

"I certainly shall not excuse you; nor, further than I can help it, shall I listen to you."

"There are a few words which I must say."

"Count Pateroff, I beg that you will leave me. This is treacherous and unmanly — and can do you no good. By what right do you follow me here?"

"I follow you for your own good, Lady Ongar; I do it that you may hear me say a few words that are necessary for you to hear."

"I will hear no words from you — that is, none willingly. By this time you ought to know me and to understand me." She had begun to walk up the hill very rapidly, and for a moment or two he had thought that she would escape him; but her breath had soon failed her, and she found herself compelled to stand while he regained his place beside her. This he had not done without an effort, and for some minutes they were both silent. "it is very beautiful," at last he said, pointing away over the sea.

"Yes; it is very beautiful," she answered. "Why did you disturb me when I was so happy?" But the count was still recovering his breath and made no answer to this question. When, however, she attempted to move

on again, still breasting the hill, he put his hand upon her arm very gently.

"Lady Ongar," he said, "you must listen to me for a moment. Why not do it without a quarrel?"

"If you mean that I cannot escape from you, it is true enough."

"Why should you want to escape? Did I ever hurt you? Before this have I not protected you from injury?"

"No — never. You protect me!"

"Yes — I; from your husband, from yourself, and from the world. You do not know — not yet, all that I have done for you. Did you read what Lord Ongar had said?"

"I read what it pleased you to write."

"What it pleased me! Do you pretend to think that Lord Ongar did not speak as he speaks there? Do you not know that those were his own words? Do you not recognize them? Ah, yes, Lady Ongar; you know them to be true."

"Their truth or falsehood is nothing to me. They are altogether indifferent to me either way."

"That would be very well if it were possible; but it is not. There; now we are at the top, and it will be easier. Will you let me have the honor to offer you my arm? No! Be it so; but I think you would walk the easier. It would not be for the first time."

"That is a falsehood." As she spoke she stepped before him, and looked into his face with eyes full of passion. "That is a positive falsehood. I never walked with a hand resting on your arm."

There came over his face the pleasantest smile as he answered her. "You forget everything," he said — "everything. But it does not matter. Other people will not forget. Julie, you had better take me for your husband. You will be better as my wife, and happier, than you can be otherwise."

"Look down there, Count Pateroff — down to the edge. If my misery is too great to be borne, I can escape from it there on better terms than you propose to me."

"Ah! That is what we call poetry. Poetry is very pretty, and in saying this as you do, you make yourself divine. But to be dashed over the cliffs and broken on the rocks — in prose is not so well."

"Sir, will you allow me to pass on while you remain; or will you let me rest here, while you return alone?"

"No, Julie; not so. I have found you with too much difficulty. In London, you see, I could not find you. Here, for a minute, you must listen to me. Do you not know, Julie, that your character is in my hands?"

"In your hands? No — never; thank God, never. But what if it were?"

"Only this — that I am forced to play the only game that you leave open to me. Chance brought you and me together in such a way that nothing but marriage can be beneficial to either of us — and I swore to Lord Ongar that it should be so. I mean that it shall be so — or that you shall be punished for your misconduct to him and to me."

"You are both insolent and false. But listen to me, since you are here and I cannot avoid you. I know what your threats mean."

"I have never threatened you. I have promised you my aid, but have used no threats."

"Not when you tell me that I shall be punished? But to avoid no punishment, if any be in your power, will I ever willingly place myself in your company. You may write of me what papers you please, and repeat of me whatever stories you may choose to fabricate, but you will not frighten me into compliance by doing so. I have; at any rate, spirit enough to resist such attempts as that."

"As you are living at present, you are alone in the world!"

"And I am content to remain alone."

"You are thinking, then, of no second marriage?"

"If I were, does that concern you? But I will speak no further word to you. If you follow me into the inn, or persecute me further by forcing yourself upon me, I will put myself under the protection of the police."

Having said this, she walked on as quickly as her strength would permit, while he walked by her side, urging upon her his old arguments as to Lord Ongar's expressed wishes, as to his own efforts on her behalf — and at last as to the strong affection with which he regarded her. But she kept her promise, and said not a word in answer to it all. For more than an hour they walked side by side, and during the greater part of that time not a syllable escaped from her. From moment to moment she kept her eye warily on him, fearing that he might take her by the arm, or attempt some violence with her. But he was too wise for this, and too fully conscious that no such proceeding on his part could be of any service to him. He continued, however, to speak to her words which she could not avoid hearing — hoping rather than thinking that he might at last frighten her by a description of all the evil which it was within his power to do her. But in acting thus he showed that he knew nothing of her character. She was not a woman whom any prospect of evil could possibly frighten into a distasteful marriage.

Within a few hundred yards of the hotel there is another fort, and at this point the path taken by Lady Ongar led into the private grounds of the inn at which she was staying. Here the count left her, raising his

hat as he did so, and saying that he hoped to see her again before she left the island.

"If you do so," said she, "it shall be in presence of those who can protect me." And so they parted.

Chapter XXXII

What Cecilia Burton Did For Her Sister-In-Law

As soon as Harry Clavering had made his promise to Mr. Burton, and had declared that he would be in Onslow Crescent that same evening, he went away from the offices at the Adelphi, feeling it to be quite impossible that he should recommence his work there at that moment, even should it ever be within his power to do so. Nor did Burton expect that he should stay. He understood, from what had passed, much of Harry's trouble, if not the whole of it; and though he did not despair on behalf of his sister, he was aware that her lover had fallen into a difficulty, from which he could not extricate himself without great suffering and much struggling. But Burton was a man who, in spite of something cynical on the surface of his character, believed well of mankind generally, and well also of men as individuals. Even though Harry had done amiss, he might be saved. And though Harry's conduct to Florence might have been bad, nay, might have been false, still, as Burton believed, he was too good to be cast aside, or spurned out of the way, without some further attempt to save him.

When Clavering had left him Burton went back to his work, and after a while succeeded in riveting his mind on the papers before him. It was a hard struggle with him, but he did it, and did not leave his business till his usual hour. It was past five when he took down his hat and his umbrella, and, as I fear, dusted his boots before he passed out of the office on to the passage. As he went he gave sundry directions to porters and clerks, as was his wont, and then walked off intent upon his usual exercise before he should reach his home.

But he had to determine on much with reference to Florence and Harry before he saw his wife. How was the meeting of the evening to take place, and in what way should it be commenced? If there were indispensable cause for his anger, in what way should he show it, and if necessity for vengeance, how should his sister be avenged? There is nothing more difficult for a man than the redressing of injuries done to a woman who is very near to him and very dear to him. The whole theory of Christian meekness and forgiveness becomes broken to pieces and falls to the ground, almost as an absurd theory, even at the idea of such wrong. What man ever forgave an insult to his wife or an injury to his sister, because he had taught himself that to forgive trespasses is a religious duty? Without an argument, without a moment's thought, the man declares to himself that such trespasses as those are not included in the general order. But what is he to do? Thirty years since his course was easy, and unless the sinner were a clergyman, he could in some sort satisfy his craving for revenge by taking a pistol in his hand, and having a shot at the offender. That method was doubtless barbarous and unreasonable, but it was satisfactory and sufficed. But what can he do now? A thoughtful, prudent, painstaking man, such as was Theodore Burton, feels that it is not given to him to attack another with his fists, to fly at his enemy's throat, and carry out his purpose after the manner of dogs. Such a one has probably something round his heart which tells him that if so attacked he could defend himself; but he knows that he has no aptitude for making such onslaught, and is conscious that such deeds of arms would be unbecoming to him. In many, perhaps in most of such cases, he may, if he please, have recourse to the laws. But any aid that the law can give him is altogether distasteful to him. The name of her that is so dear to him should be kept quiet as the grave under such misfortune, not blazoned through ten thousand columns for the amusement of all the crowd. There is nothing left for him but to spurn the man — not with his foot but with his thoughts; and the bitter consciousness that to such spurning the sinner will be indifferent. The old way was barbarous certainly, and unreasonable — but there was a satisfaction in it that has been often wanting since the use of pistols went out of fashion among us.

All this passed through Burton's mind as he walked home. One would not have supposed him to be a man eager for bloodshed — he with a wife whom he deemed to be perfect, with children who in his eyes were gracious as young gods, with all his daily work which he loved as good workers always do; but yet, as he thought of Florence, as he thought of the possibility of treachery on Harry's part, he regarded almost with dismay the conclusion to which he was forced to come — that there

could be no punishment. He might proclaim the offender to the world as false, and the world would laugh at the proclaimer, and shake hands with the offender. To sit together with such a man on a barrel of powder, or fight him over a handkerchief seemed to him to be reasonable, nay salutary, under such a grievance. There are sins, he felt, which the gods should punish with instant thunderbolts, and such sins as this were of such a nature. His Florence — pure, good, loving, true, herself totally void of all suspicion, faultless in heart as well as mind, the flower of that Burton flock which had prospered so well — that she should be sacrificed through the treachery of a man who, at his best, had scarcely been worthy of her! The thought of this was almost too much for him, and he gnashed his teeth as he went on his way.

But yet he had not given up the man. Though he could not restrain himself from foreshadowing the misery that would result from such baseness, yet he told himself that he would not condemn before condemnation was necessary. Harry Clavinging might not be good enough for Florence. What man was good enough for Florence? But still, if married, Harry, he thought, would not make a bad husband. Many a man who is prone enough to escape from the bonds which he has undertaken to endure — to escape from them before they are riveted — is mild enough under their endurance, when they are once fastened upon him. Harry Clavinging was not of such a nature that Burton could tell himself that it would be well that his sister should escape even though her way of escape must lie through the fire and water of outraged love. That Harry Clavinging was a gentleman, that he was clever, that he was by nature affectionate, soft in manner, tender of heart, anxious to please, good-tempered, and of high ambition, Burton knew well; and he partly recognized the fact that Harry had probably fallen into his present fault more by accident than by design. Clavinging was not a skilled and practiced deceiver. At last, as he drew near to his own door, he resolved on the line of conduct he would pursue. He would tell his wife everything, and she should receive Harry alone.

He was weary when he reached home, and was a little cross with his fatigue. Good man as he was, he was apt to be fretful on the first moment of his return to his own house, hot with walking, tired with his day's labor, and in want of his dinner. His wife understood this well, and always bore with him at such moments, coming down to him in the dressing-room behind the back parlor, and ministering to his wants. I fear he took some advantage of her goodness, knowing that at such moments he could grumble and scold without danger of contradiction. But the institution was established, and Cecilia never rebelled against its traditional laws. On the present day he had much to say to her, but

even that he could not say without some few symptoms of petulant weariness.

"I'm afraid you've had a terrible long day," she said.

"I don't know what you call terribly long. I find the days terribly short. I have had Harry with me, as I told you I should."

"Well, well. Say in one word, dear, that it is all right — if it is so."

"But it is not all right. I wonder what on earth the men do to the boots, that I can never get a pair that do not hurt me in walking." At this moment she was standing over him with his slippers.

"Will you have a glass of sherry before dinner, dear; you are so tired?"

"Sherry — no!"

"And what about Harry? You don't mean to say —"

"If you'll listen, I'll tell you what I do mean to say." Then he described to her as well as he could, what had really taken place between him and Harry Clavering at the office.

"He cannot mean to be false, if he is coming here," said the wife.

"He does not mean to be false; but he is one of those men who can be false without meaning it, who allow themselves to drift away from their anchors, and to be carried out into seas of misery and trouble, because they are not careful in looking to their tackle. I think that he may still be held to a right course, and therefore I have begged him to come here."

"I am sure that you are right, Theodore. He is so good and so affectionate, and he made himself so much one of us!"

"Yes; too easily by half. That is just the danger. But look here, Cissy. I'll tell you what I mean to do. I will not see him myself; at any rate, not at first. Probably I had better not see him at all. You shall talk to him."

"By myself?"

"Why not? You and he have always been great friends, and he is a man who can speak more openly to a woman than to another man."

"And what shall I say as to your absence?"

"Just the truth. Tell him that I am remaining in the dining room because I think his task will be easier with you in my absence. He has got himself into some mess with that woman."

"With Lady Ongar?"

"Yes; not that her name was mentioned between us, but I suppose it is so."

"Horrible woman; wicked, wretched creature!"

"I know nothing about that, nor, as I suppose, do you."

"My dear, you must have heard."

"But if I had — and I don't know that I have — I need not have believed. I am told that she married an old man who is now dead, and I suppose she wants a young husband."

"My dear!"

"If I were you, Cissy, I would say as little as might be about her. She was an old friend of Harry's —"

"She jilted him when he was quite a boy; I know that — long before he had seen our Florence."

"And she is connected with him through his cousin. Let her be ever so bad, I should drop that."

"You can't suppose, Theodore, that I want even to mention her name. I'm told that nobody ever visits her."

"She needn't be a bit the worse on that account. Whenever I hear that there is a woman whom nobody visits, I always feel inclined to go and pay my respects to her."

"Theodore, how can you say so?"

"And that, I suppose, is just what Harry has done. If the world and his wife had visited Lady Ongar, there would not have been all this trouble now."

Mrs. Burton of course undertook the task which her husband assigned to her, though she did so with much nervous trepidation, and many fears lest the desired object should be lost through her own maladroitness. With her, there was at least no doubt as to the thing to be done — no hesitation as to the desirability of securing Harry Clavering for the Burton faction. Everything in her mind was to be forgiven to Harry, and he was to be received by them all with open arms and loving caresses, if he would only abandon Lady Ongar altogether. To secure her lover for Florence, was Mrs. Burton's single and simple object. She raised no questions now within her own breast as to whether Harry would make a good husband. Any such question as that should have been asked and answered before he had been accepted at Stratton. The thing to be done now was to bring Harry and Florence together, and — since such terrible dangers were intervening — to make them man and wife with as little further delay as might be possible. The name of Lady Ongar was odious to her. When men went astray in matters of love, it was within the power of Cecilia Burton's heart to forgive them; but she could not pardon women that so sinned. This countess had once jilted Harry, and that was enough to secure her condemnation. And since that, what terrible things had been said of her! And dear, uncharitable Cecilia Burton was apt to think, when evil was spoken of women — of women whom she did not know — that there could not be smoke without fire. And now this woman was a widow with a large

fortune, and wanted a husband! What business had any widow to want a husband? It is so easy for wives to speak and think after that fashion when they are satisfied with their own ventures.

It was arranged that when Harry came to the door, Mrs. Burton should go up alone to the drawing room and receive him there, remaining with her husband in the dining room till he should come. Twice while sitting downstairs after the cloth was gone she ran upstairs with the avowed purpose of going into the nursery, but in truth that she might see that the room was comfortable, that it looked pretty, and that the chairs were so arranged as to be convenient. The two eldest children were with them in the parlor, and when she started on her second errand, Cissy reminded her that baby would be asleep. Theodore, who understood the little maneuver, smiled, but said nothing, and his wife, who in such matters was resolute, went and made her further little changes in the furniture. At last there came the knock at the door — the expected knock, a knock which told something of the hesitating, unhappy mind of him who had rapped, and Mrs. Burton started on her business. "Tell him just simply why you are there alone," said her husband.

"Is it Harry Clavering?" Cissy asked, "and mayn't I go?"

"It is Harry Clavering," her father said, "and you may not go. Indeed, it is time you went somewhere else."

It was Harry Clavering. He had not spent a pleasant day since he had left Mr. Beilby's offices in the morning, and, now that he had come to Onslow Crescent, he did not expect to spend a pleasant evening. When I declare that as yet he had not come to any firm resolution, I fear that he will be held as being too weak for the role of hero even in such pages as these. Perhaps no terms have been so injurious to the profession of the novelist as those two words, hero and heroine. In spite of the latitude which is allowed to the writer in putting his own interpretation upon these words, something heroic is still expected; whereas, if he attempt to paint from nature, how little that is heroic should he describe! How many young men, subjected to the temptations which had befallen Harry Clavering — how many young men whom you, delicate reader, number among your friends — would have come out from them unscathed? A man, you say, delicate reader, a true man can love but one woman — but one at a time. So you say, and are so convinced; but no conviction was ever more false. When a true man has loved with all his heart and all his soul — does he cease to love — does he cleanse his heart of that passion when circumstances run against him, and he is forced to turn elsewhere for his life's companion? Or is he untrue as a lover in that he does not waste his life in desolation, because he has been disappointed? Or does his old love perish and die away, because another

has crept into his heart? No; the first love, if that was true, is ever there; and should she and he meet after many years, though their heads be grey and their cheeks wrinkled, there will still be a touch of the old passion as their hands meet for a moment. Methinks that love never dies, unless it be murdered by downright ill-usage. It may be so murdered, but even, ill-usage will more often fail than succeed in that enterprise. How, then, could Harry fail to love the woman whom he had loved first, when she returned to him still young, still beautiful, and told him, with all her charms and all her flattery, how her heart stood toward him?

But it is not to be thought that I excuse him altogether. A man, though he may love many, should be devoted only to one. The man's feeling to the woman whom he is to marry should be this: — that not from love only, but from chivalry, from manhood, and from duty, he will be prepared always, and at all hazards, to defend her from every misadventure, to struggle ever that she may be happy, to see that no wind blows upon her with needless severity, that no ravening wolf of a misery shall come near her, that her path be swept clean for her — as clean as may be, and that her roof tree be made firm upon a rock. There is much of this which is quite independent of love — much of it that may be done without love. This is devotion, and it is this which a man owes to the woman who has once promised to be his wife, and has not forfeited her right. Doubtless Harry Clavering should have remembered this at the first moment of his weakness in Lady Ongar's drawing room. Doubtless he should have known at once that his duty to Florence made it necessary that he should declare his engagement — even though, in doing so, he might have seemed to caution Lady Ongar on that point on which no woman can endure a caution. But the fault was hers, and the caution was needed. No doubt he should not have returned to Bolton Street. He should not have cozened himself by trusting himself to her assurances of friendship; he should have kept warm his love for the woman to whom his hand was owed, not suffering himself to make comparisons to her injury. He should have been chivalric, manly, full of high duty. He should have been all this, and full also of love, and then he would have been a hero. But men as I see them are not often heroic.

As he entered the room he saw Mrs. Burton at once, and then looked round quickly for her husband. "Harry," said she, "I am so glad to see you once again," and she gave him her hand, and smiled on him with that sweet look which used to make him feel that it was pleasant to be near her. He took her hand and muttered some word of greeting, and then looked round again for Mr. Burton. "Theodore is not here," she

said, "he thought it better that you and I should have a little talk together. He said you would like it best so; but perhaps I ought not to tell you that."

"I do like it best so — much best. I can speak to you as I could hardly speak to him."

"What is it, Harry, that ails you? What has kept you away from us? Why do you leave poor Flo so long without writing to her? She will be here on Monday. You will come and see her then; or perhaps you will go with me and meet her at the station?"

"Burton said that she was coming, but I did not understand that it was so soon."

"You do not think it too soon, Harry; do you?"

"No," said Harry, but his tone belied his assertion. At any rate he had not pretended to display any of a lover's rapture at this prospect of seeing the lady whom he loved.

"Sit down, Harry. Why do you stand like that and look so comfortless? Theodore says that you have some trouble at heart. Is it a trouble that you can tell to a friend such as I am?"

"It is very hard to tell. Oh, Mrs. Burton, I am broken-hearted. For the last two weeks I have wished that I might die."

"Do not say that, Harry; that would be wicked."

"Wicked or not, it is true. I have been so wretched that I have not known how to hold myself. I could not bring myself to write to Florence."

"But why not? You do not mean that you are false to Florence. You cannot mean that. Harry, say at once that it is not so, and I will promise you her forgiveness, Theodore's forgiveness, all our forgiveness for anything else. Oh, Harry, say anything but that." In answer to this Harry Clavering had nothing to say, but sat with his head resting on his arm and his face turned away from her. "Speak, Harry; if you are a man, say something. Is it so? If it be so, I believe that you will have killed her. Why do you not speak to me? Harry Clavering, tell me what is the truth."

Then he told her all his story, not looking her once in the face, not changing his voice, suppressing his emotion till he came to the history of the present days. He described to her how he had loved Julia Brabazon, and how his love had been treated by her; how he had sworn to himself, when he knew that she had in truth become that lord's wife, that for her sake he would keep himself from loving any other woman. Then he spoke of his first days at Stratton and of his early acquaintance with Florence, and told her how different had been his second love — how it had grown gradually and with no check to his confidence, till

he felt sure that the sweet girl who was so often near him would, if he could win her, be to him a source of joy for all his life. "And so she shall," said Cecilia, with tears running down her cheeks; "she shall do so yet." And he went on with his tale, saying how pleasant it had been for him to find himself at home in Onslow Crescent; how he had joyed in calling her Cecilia, and having her infants in his arms, as though they were already partly belonging to him. And he told her how he had met the young widow at the station, having employed himself on her behalf at her sister's instance; and how cold she had been to him, offending him by her silence and somber pride. "False woman!" exclaimed Mrs. Burton. "Oh, Cecilia, do not abuse her — do not say a word till you know all." "I know that she is false," said Mrs. Burton, with vehement indignation. "She is not false," said Harry; "if there be falsehood, it is mine." Then he went on, and said how different she was when next he saw her. How then he understood that her solemn and haughty manner had been almost forced on her by the mode of her return, with no other friend to meet her. "She has deserved no friend," said Mrs. Burton. "You wrong her," said Harry; "you do not know her. If any woman has been ever sinned against, it is she." "But was she not false from the very first — false, that she might become rich by marrying a man that she did not love? Will you speak up for her after that? Oh, Harry, think of it."

"I will speak up for her," said Harry; and now it seemed for the first time that something of his old boldness had returned to him. "I will speak up for her, although she did as you say, because she has suffered as few women have been made to suffer, and because she has repented in ashes as few women are called on to repent." And now as he warmed with his feeling for her, he uttered his words faster and with less of shame in his voice. He described how he had gone again and again to Bolton Street, thinking no evil, till — till — till something of the old feeling had come back upon him. He meant to be true in his story, but I doubt whether he told all the truth. How could he tell it all? How could he confess that the blaze of the woman's womanhood, the flame of her beauty, and the fire engendered by her mingled rank and suffering, had singed him and burned him up, poor moth that he was? "And then at last I learned," said he, "that — that she had loved me more than I had believed."

"And is Florence to suffer because she has postponed her love of you to her love of money?"

"Mrs. Burton, if you do not understand it now, I do not know that I can tell you more. Florence alone in this matter is altogether good.

Lady Ongar has been wrong, and I have been wrong. I sometimes think that Florence is too good for me."

"It is for her to say that, if it be necessary."

"I have told you all now, and you will know why I have not come to you."

"No, Harry; you have not told me all. Have you told that — woman that she should be your wife?" To this question he made no immediate answer, and she repeated it. "Tell me: have you told her you would marry her?"

"I did tell her so."

"And you will keep your word to her?" Harry, as he heard the words, was struck with awe that there should be such vehemence, such anger, in the voice of so gentle a woman as Cecilia Burton. "Answer me, sir, do you mean to marry this — countess?" But still he made no answer. "I do not wonder that you cannot speak," she said. "Oh, Florence — oh, my darling; my lost, broken-hearted angel!" Then she turned away her face and wept.

"Cecilia," he said, attempting to approach her with his hand, without rising from his chair.

"No, sir; when I desired you to call me so, it was because I thought you were to be a brother. I did not think that there could be a thing so weak as you. Perhaps you had better go now, lest you should meet my husband in his wrath, and he should spurn you."

But Harry Clavering still sat in his chair, motionless — motionless, and without a word. After a while he turned his face toward her, and even in her own misery she was stricken by the wretchedness of his countenance. Suddenly she rose quickly from her chair, and coming close to him, threw herself on her knees before him. "Harry," she said, "Harry; it is not yet too late. Be our own Harry again; our dearest Harry. Say that it shall be so. What is this woman to you? What has she done for you, that for her you should throw aside such a one as our Florence? Is she noble, and good, and pure and spotless as Florence is? Will she love you with such love as Florence's? Will she believe in you as Florence believes? Yes, Harry, she believes yet. She knows nothing of this, and shall know nothing, if you will only say that you will be true. No one shall know, and I will remember it only to remember your goodness afterward. Think of it, Harry; there can be no falseness to one who has been so false to you. Harry, you will not destroy us all at one blow?"

Never before was man so supplicated to take into his arms youth and beauty and feminine purity! And in truth he would have yielded, as indeed, what man would not have yielded — had not Mrs. Burton been interrupted in her prayers. The step of her husband was heard upon the

stairs, and she, rising from her knees, whispered quickly, "Do not tell him that it is settled. Let me tell him when you are gone."

"You two have been a long time together," said Theodore, as he came in.

"Why did you leave us, then, so long?" said Mrs. Burton, trying to smile, though the signs of tears were, as she well knew, plain enough.

"I thought you would have sent for me."

"Burton," said Harry, "I take it kindly of you that you allowed me to see your wife alone."

"Women always understand these things best," said he.

"And you will come again tomorrow, Harry, and answer me my question?"

"Not to — morrow."

"Florence will be here on Monday."

"And why should he not come when Florence is here?" asked Theodore in an angry tone.

"Of course he will come, but I want to see him again first. Do I not, Harry?"

"I hate mysteries," said Burton.

"There shall be no mystery," said his wife. "Why did you send him to me, but that there are some things difficult to discuss among three? Will you come tomorrow, Harry?"

"Not tomorrow; but I will write tomorrow — early tomorrow. I will go now, and, of course, you will tell Burton everything that I have said. Goodnight." They both took his hand, and Cecilia pressed it as she looked with beseeching eyes into his face. What would she not have done to secure the happiness of the sister whom she loved? On this occasion she had descended low that she might do much.

Chapter XXXIII

How Damon Parted From Pythias

Lady Ongar, when she left Count Pateroff at the little fort on the cliff and entered by herself the gardens belonging to the hotel, had long since made up her mind that there should at last be a positive severance between herself and her devoted Sophie. For half an hour she had been walking in silence by the count's side; and though, of course, she had heard all that he had spoken, she had been able in that time to consider much. It must have been through Sophie that the count had heard of her journey to the Isle of Wight; and, worse than that, Sophie must, as she thought, have instigated this pursuit. In that she wronged her poor friend. Sophie had been simply paid by her brother for giving such information as enabled him to arrange this meeting. She had not even counseled him to follow Lady Ongar. But now Lady Ongar, in blind wrath, determined that Sophie should be expelled from her bosom. Lady Ongar would find this task of expulsion the less difficult in that she had come to loathe her devoted friend, and to feel it to be incumbent on her to rid herself of such devotion. Now had arrived the moment in which it might be done.

And yet there were difficulties. Two ladies living together in an inn cannot, without much that is disagreeable, send down to the landlord saying that they want separate rooms, because they have taken it into their minds to hate each other. And there would, moreover, be something awkward in saying to Sophie that, though she was discarded, her bill should be paid — for this last and only time. No; Lady Ongar had already perceived that would not do. She would not quarrel with Sophie after that fashion. She would leave the Isle of Wight on the following morning early, informing Sophie why she did so, and would offer money to the little Franco-Pole, presuming that it might not be agreeable to the Franco-Pole to be hurried away from her marine or rural happiness so quickly. But in doing this she would be careful to make Sophie understand that Bolton Street was to be closed against her forever

afterward. With neither Count Pateroff nor his sister would she ever again willingly place herself in contact.

It was dark as she entered the house — the walk out, her delay there, and her return having together occupied her three hours. She had hardly felt the dusk growing on her as she progressed steadily on her way, with that odious man beside her. She had been thinking of other things, and her eyes had accustomed themselves gradually to the fading twilight. But now, when she saw the glimmer of the lamps from the inn-windows, she knew that the night had come upon her, and she began to fear that she had been imprudent in allowing herself to be out so late — imprudent, even had she succeeded in being alone. She went direct to her own room, that, womanlike, she might consult her own face as to the effects of the insult she had received, and then having, as it were, steadied herself, and prepared herself for the scene that was to follow, she descended to the sitting room and encountered her friend. The friend was the first to speak; and the reader will kindly remember that the friend had ample reason for knowing what companion Lady Ongar had been likely to meet upon the downs.

"Julie, dear, how late you are," said Sophie, as though she were rather irritated in having been kept so long waiting for her tea.

"I am late," said Lady Ongar.

"And don't you think you are imprudent — all alone, you know, dear; just a leetle imprudent."

"Very imprudent, indeed. I have been thinking of that now as I crossed the lawn, and found how dark it was. I have been very imprudent; but I have escaped without much injury."

"Escaped! escaped what? Have you escaped a cold, or a drunken man?"

"Both, as I think." Then she sat down, and, having rung the bell, she ordered tea.

"There seems to be something very odd with you," said Sophie. "I do not quite understand you."

"When did you see your brother last?" Lady Ongar asked.

"My brother?"

"Yes, Count Pateroff. When did you see him last?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"Well, it does not signify, as of course you will not tell me. But will you say when you will see him next?"

"How can I tell?"

"Will it be tonight?"

"Julia, what do you mean?"

"Only this, that I wish you would make him understand that if he has anything to do concerning me, he might as well do it out of hand. For the last hour —"

"Then you have seen him?"

"Yes; is not that wonderful? I have seen him."

"And why could you not tell him yourself what you had to say? He and I do not agree about certain things, and I do not like to carry messages to him. And you have seen him here on this sacre seacoast?"

"Exactly so; on this sacre seacoast. Is it not odd that he should have known that I was here — know the very inn we were at-and know, too, whither I was going tonight?"

"He would learn that from the servants, my dear."

"No doubt. He has been good enough to amuse me with mysterious threats as to what he would do to punish me if I would not —"

"Become his wife?" suggested Sophie.

"Exactly. It was very flattering on his part. I certainly do not intend to become his wife."

"Ah, you like better that young Clavering who has the other sweet-heart. He is younger. That is true."

"Upon my word, yes. I like my cousin, Harry Clavering, much better than I like your brother; but, as I take it, that has not much to do with it. I was speaking of your brother's threats. I do not understand them; but I wish he could be made to understand that if he has anything to do, he had better go and do it. As for marriage, I would sooner marry the first plowboy I could find in the fields."

"Julie — you need not insult him."

"I will have no more of your Julie; and I will have no more of you." As she said this she rose from her chair, and she walked about the room. "You have betrayed me, and there shall be an end of it."

"Betrayed you! what nonsense you talk. In what have I betrayed you?"

"You set him upon my track here, though you knew I desired to avoid him."

"And is that all? I was coming here to this detestable island, and I told my brother. That is my offence — and then you talk of betraying! Julie, you sometimes are a goose."

"Very often, no doubt; but, Madam Gordeloup, if you please we will be geese apart for the future."

"Oh, certainly; if you wish it."

"I do wish it."

"It cannot hurt me. I can choose my friends anywhere. The world is open to me to go where I please into society. I am not at a loss."

All this Lady Ongar well understood, but she could bear it without injury to her temper. Such revenge was to be expected from such a woman "I do not want you to be at a loss," she said. "I only want you to understand that after what has this evening occurred between your brother and me, our acquaintance had better cease."

"And I am to be punished for my brother?"

"You said just now that it would be no punishment, and I was glad to hear it. Society is, as you say, open to you, and you will lose nothing."

"Of course society is open to me. Have I committed myself? I am not talked about for my lovers by all the town. Why should I be at a loss? No."

"I shall return to London tomorrow by the earliest opportunity. I have already told them so, and have ordered a carriage to go to Yarmouth at eight."

"And you leave me here, alone!"

"Your brother is here, Madam Gordeloup."

"My brother is nothing to me. You know well that. He has come and can go when he please. I come here to follow you — to be companion to you, to oblige you — and now you say you go and leave me in this detestable barrack. If I am here alone, I will be revenged."

"You shall go back with me if you wish it."

"At eight o'clock in the morning — and see, it is now eleven; while you have been wandering about alone with my brother in the dark! No; I will not go so early morning as that. Tomorrow is Saturday — you was to remain till Tuesday."

"You may do as you please. I will go at eight tomorrow."

"Very well. You go at eight, very well. And who will pay for the *beels* when you are gone, Lady Ongar?"

"I have already ordered the bill up tomorrow morning. If you will allow me to offer you twenty pounds, that will bring you to London when you please to follow."

"Twenty pounds! What is twenty pounds? No; I will not have your twenty pounds." And she pushed away from her the two notes which Lady Ongar had already put upon the table. "Who is to pay me for the loss of all my time? Tell me that. I have devoted myself to you. Who will pay me for that?"

"Not I, certainly, Madam Gordeloup."

"Not you! You will not pay me for my time — for a whole year I have been devoted to you! You will not pay me, and you send me away in this way? By Gar, you will be made to pay — through the nose."

As the interview was becoming unpleasant, Lady Ongar took her candle and went away to bed, leaving the twenty pounds on the table.

As she left the room she knew that the money was there, but she could not bring herself to pick it up and restore it to her pocket. It was improbable, she thought, that Madam Gordeloup would leave it to the mercy of the waiters; and the chances were that the notes would go into the pocket for which they were intended.

And such was the result. Sophie, when she was left alone, got up from her seat, and stood for some moments on the rug, making her calculations. That Lady Ongar should be very angry about Count Pateroff's presence Sophie had expected; but she had not expected that her friend's anger would be carried to such extremity that she would pronounce a sentence of banishment for life. But, perhaps, after all, it might be well for Sophie herself that such sentence should be carried out. This fool of a woman with her income, her park, and her rank, was going to give herself — so said Sophie to herself — to a young, handsome, proud, pig of a fellow — so Sophie called him — who had already shown himself to be Sophie's enemy, and who would certainly find no place for Sophie Gordeloup within his house. Might it not be well that the quarrel should be consummated now — such compensation being obtained as might possibly be extracted. Sophie certainly knew a good deal, which it might be for the convenience of the future husband to keep dark — or convenient for the future wife that the future husband should not know. Terms might be yet had, although Lady Ongar had refused to pay anything beyond that trumpery twenty pounds. Terms might be had; or, indeed, it might be that Lady Ongar herself, when her anger was over, might sue for a reconciliation. Or Sophie — and this idea occurred as Sophie herself became a little despondent after long calculation — Sophie herself might acknowledge herself to be wrong, begging pardon, and weeping on her friend's neck. Perhaps it might be worth while to make some further calculation in bed. Then Sophie, softly drawing the notes toward her as a cat might have done, and hiding them somewhere about her person, also went to her room.

Chapter XXXIV

Vain Repentance

In the morning Lady Ongar prepared herself for starting at eight o'clock, and, as a part of that preparation, had her breakfast brought to her upstairs. When the time was up, she descended to the sitting room on the way to the carriage, and there she found Sophie, also prepared for a journey.

"I am going too. You will let me go?" said Sophie.

"Certainly," said Lady Ongar. "I proposed to you to do so yesterday."

"You should not be so hard upon your poor friend," said Sophie. This was said in the bearing of Lady Ongar's maid and of two waiters, and Lady Ongar made no reply to it. When they were in the carriage together, the maid being then stowed away in a dickey or rumble behind, Sophie again whined and was repentant. "Julie, you should not be so hard upon your poor Sophie."

"It seems to me that the hardest things said were spoken by you."

"Then I will beg your pardon. I am impulsive. I do not restrain myself. When I am angry I say I know not what. If I said any words that were wrong, I will apologize, and beg to be forgiven — there — On my knees." And, as she spoke, the adroit little woman contrived to get herself down upon her knees on the floor of the carriage. "There; say that I am forgiven; say that Sophie is pardoned." The little woman had calculated that even should her Julia pardon her, Julia would hardly condescend to ask for the two ten-pound notes.

But Lady Ongar had stoutly determined that there should be no further intimacy, and had reflected that a better occasion for a quarrel could hardly be vouchsafed to her than that afforded by Sophie's treachery in bringing her brother down to Freshwater. She was too strong, and too much mistress of her will, to be cheated now out of her advantage. "Madam Gordeloup, that attitude is absurd; I beg you will get up."

"Never; never till you have pardoned me." And Sophie crouched still lower, till she was all among the dressing-cases and little bags at the bottom of the carriage. "I will not get up till you say the words, 'Sophie, dear, I forgive you.'"

"Then I fear you will have an uncomfortable drive. Luckily it will be very short. It is only half-an-hour to Yarmouth."

"And I will kneel again on board the packet; and on the — what you call, platform — and in the railway carriage — and in the street. I will kneel to my Julie everywhere, till she say, 'Sophie, dear, I forgive you!'"

"Madam Gordeloup, pray understand me; between you and me there shall be no further intimacy."

"Certainly not. No further explanation is necessary, but our intimacy has certainly come to an end."

"It has."

"Undoubtedly."

"Julie!"

"That is such nonsense. Madam Gordeloup, you are disgracing yourself by your proceedings."

"Oh! disgracing myself, am I?" In saying this Sophie picked herself up from among the dressing-cases, and recovered her seat. "I am disgracing myself! Well, I know very well whose disgrace is the most talked about in the world, yours or mine. Disgracing myself; and from you? What did your husband say of you himself?"

Lady Ongar began to feel that even a very short journey might be too long. Sophie was now quite up, and was wriggling herself on her seat, adjusting her clothes which her late attitude had disarranged, not in, the most graceful manner.

"You shall see," she continued. "Yes, you shall see. Tell me of disgrace! I have only disgraced myself by being with you. Ah — very well. Yes; I will get out. As for being quiet, I shall be quiet whenever I like it. I know when to talk, and when to hold my tongue. Disgrace!" So saying she stepped out of the carriage, leaning on the arm of a boatman who had come to the door, and who had heard her last words.

It may be imagined that all this did not contribute much to the comfort of Lady Ongar. They were now on the little pier at Yarmouth, and in five minutes everyone there knew who she was, and knew also that there had been some disagreement between her and the little foreigner. The eyes of the boatmen, and of the drivers, and of the other travelers, and of the natives going over to the market at Lymington, were all on her, and the eyes also of all the idlers of Yarmouth who had congregated there to watch the dispatch of the early boat. But she bore it well, seating herself, with her maid beside her, on one of the benches

on the deck, and waiting there with patience till the boat should start. Sophie once or twice muttered the word "disgrace!" but beyond that she remained silent.

They crossed over the little channel without a word, and without a word made their way up to the railway-station. Lady Ongar had been too confused to get tickets for their journey at Yarmouth, but had paid on board the boat for the passage of the three persons — herself, her maid, and Sophie. But, at the station at Lymington, the more important business of taking tickets for the journey to London became necessary. Lady Ongar had thought of this on her journey across the water, and, when at the railway-station, gave her purse to her maid, whispering her orders. The girl took three first-class tickets, and then going gently up to Madam Gordeloup, offered one to that lady. "Ah, yes; very well; I understand," said Sophie, taking the ticket. "I shall take this;" and she held the ticket up in her hand, as though she had some specially mysterious purpose in accepting it.

She got into the same carriage with Lady Ongar and her maid, but spoke no word on her journey up to London. At Basingstoke she had a glass of sherry, for which Lady Ongar's maid paid. Lady Ongar had telegraphed for her carriage, which was waiting for her, but Sophie betook herself to a cab. "Shall I pay the cabman, ma'am?" said the maid. "Yes," said Sophie, "or stop. It will be half-a-crown. You had better give me the half-crown." The maid did so, and in this way the careful Sophie added another shilling to her store — over and above the twenty pounds — knowing well that the fare to Mount Street was eighteenpence.

Chapter XXXV

Doodles In Mount Street

Captain Clavering and Captain Boodle had, as may be imagined, discussed at great length and with much frequency the results of the

former captain's negotiations with the Russian spy, and it had been declared strongly by the latter captain, and ultimately admitted by the former, that those results were not satisfactory. Seventy pounds had been expended, and, so to say, nothing had been accomplished. It was in vain that Archie, unwilling to have it thought that he had been worsted in diplomacy, argued that with these political personages, and especially with Russian political personages, the ambages were everything — that the preliminaries were in fact the whole, and that when they were arranged, the thing was done. Doodles proved to demonstration that the thing was not done, and that seventy pounds was too much for mere preliminaries. "My dear fellow," he said, speaking, I fear, with some scorn in his voice, "where are you? That's what I want to know. Where are you? Just nowhere." This was true. All that Archie had received from Madam Gordeloup in return for his last payment, was an intimation that no immediate day could be at present named for a renewal of his personal attack upon the countess; but that a day might be named when he should next come to Mount Street — provision, of course, being made that he should come with a due qualification under his glove. Now, the original basis on which Archie was to carry on his suit had been arranged to be this — that Lady Ongar should be made to know that he was there; and the way in which Doodles had illustrated this precept by the artistic and allegorical use of his heel was still fresh in Archie's memory. The meeting in which they had come to that satisfactory understanding had taken place early in the Spring, and now June was coming on, and the countess certainly did not as yet know that her suitor was there! If anything was to be done by the Russian spy it should be done quickly, and Doodles did not refrain from expressing his opinion that his friend was "putting his foot into it," and "making a mull of the whole thing." Now Archie Clavering was a man not eaten up by the vice of self-confidence, but prone rather to lean upon his friends, and anxious for the aid of counsel in difficulty.

"What the devil is a fellow to do?" he asked. "Perhaps I had better give it all up. Everybody says that she is as proud as Lucifer; and, after all, nobody knows what rigs she has been up to."

But this was by no means the view which Doodles was inclined to take. He was a man who in the field never gave up a race because he was thrown out at the start, having perceived that patience would achieve as much, perhaps, as impetuosity. He had ridden many a waiting race, and had won some of them. He was never so sure of his hand at billiards as when the score was strong against him. "Always fight while there's any fight left in you," was a maxim with him. He never surrendered a bet as lost, till the evidence as to the facts was quite conclusive, and had

taught himself to regard any chance, be it ever so remote, as a kind of property.

"Never say die," was his answer to Archie's remark. "You see, Clavvy, you have still a few good cards, and you can never know what a woman really means till you have popped yourself. As to what she did when she was away, and all that, you see when a woman has got seven thousand a year in her own right, it covers a multitude of sins."

"Of course, I know that."

"And why should a fellow be uncharitable? If a man is to believe all that he hears, by George, they're all much of a muchness. For my part I never believe anything. I always suppose every horse will run to win; and though there may be a cross now and again, that's the surest line to go upon. D'you understand me now?" Archie said that of course he understood him; but I fancy that Doodles had gone a little too deep for Archie's intellect.

"I should say, drop this woman, and go at the widow yourself at once."

"And lose all my seventy pounds for nothing!"

"You're not soft enough to suppose that you'll ever get it back again, I hope?" Archie assured his friend that he was not soft enough for any such hope as that, and then the two remained silent for a while, deeply considering the posture of the affair. "I'll tell you what I'll do for you," said Doodles; "and upon my word I think it will be the best thing."

"And what's that?"

"I'll go to this woman myself."

"What; to Lady Ongar?"

"No; but to the spy, as you call her. Principals are never the best for this kind of work. When a man has to pay the money himself he can never make so good a bargain as another can make for him. That stands to reason. And I can be blunter with her about it than you can; can go straight at it, you know; and you may be sure of this, she won't get any money from me, unless I get the marbles for it."

"You'll take some with you, then?"

"Well, yes; that is, if it's convenient. We were talking of going two or three hundred pounds, you know, and you've only gone seventy as yet. Suppose you hand me over the odd thirty. If she gets it out of me easy, tell me my name isn't Boodle."

There was much in this that was distasteful to Captain Clavering, but at last he submitted, and handed over the thirty pounds to his friend. Then there was considerable doubt whether the ambassador should announce himself by a note, but it was decided at last that his arrival should not be expected. If he did not find the lady at home or disengaged

on the first visit, or on the second, he might on the third or the fourth. He was a persistent, patient little man, and assured his friend that he would certainly see Madam Gordeloup before a week had passed over their heads.

On the occasion of his first visit to Mount Street, Sophie Gordeloup was enjoying her retreat in the Isle of Wight. When he called the second time she was in bed, the fatigue of her journey on the previous day — the day on which she had actually risen at seven o'clock in the morning — having oppressed her much. She had returned in the cab alone, and had occupied herself much on the same evening. Now that she was to be parted from her Julie, it was needful that she should be occupied. She wrote a long letter to her brother — much more confidential than her letters to him had lately been — telling him how much she had suffered on his behalf, and describing to him with great energy the perverseness, malignity, and general pigheadedness of her late friend. Then she wrote an anonymous letter to Mrs. Burton, whose name and address she had learned, after having ascertained from Archie the fact of Harry Clavering's engagement. In this letter she described the wretched wiles by which that horrid woman Lady Ongar was struggling to keep Harry and Miss Burton apart. "It is very bad, but it is true," said the diligent little woman. "She has been seen in his embrace; I know it." After that she dressed and went out into society — the society of which she had boasted as being open to her — to the house of some hanger-on of some embassy, and listened, and whispered, and laughed when some old sinner joked with her, and talked poetry to a young man who was foolish and lame, but who had some money, and got a glass of wine and a cake for nothing, and so was very busy; and on her return home calculated that her cab-hire for the evening had been judiciously spent. But her diligence had been so great that when Captain Boodle called the next morning at twelve o'clock she was still in bed. Had she been in dear Paris, or in dearer Vienna, that would have not hindered her from receiving the visit; but in pigheaded London this could not be done; and, therefore, when she had duly scrutinized Captain Boodle's card, and had learned from the servant that Captain Boodle desired to see herself on very particular business, she made an appointment with him for the following day.

On the following day at the same hour Doodles came and was shown up into her room. He had scrupulously avoided any smartness of apparel, calculating that a Newmarket costume would be, of all dresses, the most efficacious in filling her with an idea of his smartness; whereas Archie had probably injured himself much by his polished leather boots, and general newness of clothing. Doodles, therefore, wore a cut-away

coat, a colored shirt with a fogle round his neck, old brown trousers that fitted very tightly round his legs, and was careful to take no gloves with him. He was a man with a small, bullet head, who wore his hair cut very short, and had no other beard than a slight appendage on his lower chin. He certainly did possess a considerable look of smartness, and when he would knit his brows and nod his head, some men were apt to think that it was not easy to get on the soft side of him.

Sophie on this occasion was not arrayed with that becoming negligence which had graced her appearance when Captain Clavering had called. She knew that a visitor was coming, and the questionably white wrapper had been exchanged for an ordinary dress. This was regretted, rather than otherwise, by Captain Boodle, who had received from Archie a description of the lady's appearance, and who had been anxious to see the spy in her proper and peculiar habiliments. It must be remembered that Sophie knew nothing of her present visitor, and was altogether unaware that he was in any way connected with Captain Clavering.

"You are Captain Boddle," she said, looking hard at Doodles as he bowed to her on entering the room.

"Captain Boodle, ma'am; at your service."

"Oh, Captain Bood-dle; it is English name, I suppose?"

"Certainly, ma'am, certainly. Altogether English, I believe. Our Boodles come out of Warwickshire; small property near Leamington — doosed small, I'm sorry to say."

She looked at him very hard, and was altogether unable to discover what was the nature or probable mode of life of the young man before her. She had lived much in England, and had known Englishmen of many classes, but she could not remember that she had ever become conversant with such a one as he who was now before her. Was he a gentleman, or might he be a house-breaker? "A doosed small property near Leamington," she said, repeating the words after him. "Oh!"

"But my visit to you, ma'am, has nothing to do with that."

"Nothing to do with the small property."

"Nothing in life."

"Then, Captain Bood-dle, what may it have to do with?"

Hereupon Doodles took a chair, not having been invited to go through that ceremony. According to the theory created in her mind at the instant, this man was not at all like an English captain. Captain is an unfortunate title, somewhat equivalent to the foreign count — unfortunate in this respect, that it is easily adopted by many whose claims to it are very slight. Archie Clavering, with his polished leather boots, had looked like a captain — had come up to her idea of a captain — but

this man! The more she regarded him, the stronger in her mind became the idea of the housebreaker.

"My business, ma'am, is of a very delicate nature — of a nature very delicate indeed. But I think that you and I, who understand the world, may soon come to understand each other."

"Oh, you understand the world. Very well, sir. Go on."

"Now, ma'am, money is money, you know."

"And a goose is a goose; but what of that?"

"Yes; a goose is a goose, and some people are not geese. Nobody, ma'am, would think of calling you a goose."

"I hope not. It would be so uncivil, even an Englishman would not say it. Will you go on?"

"I think you have the pleasure of knowing Lady Ongar?"

"Knowing who?" said Sophie, almost shrieking.

"Lady Ongar."

During the last day or two Sophie's mind had been concerned very much with her dear Julie, but had not been concerned at all with the affairs of Captain Clavering, and, therefore, when Lady Ongar's name was mentioned, her mind went away altogether to the quarrel, and did not once refer itself to the captain. Could it be that this was an attorney, and was it possible that Julie would be mean enough to make claims upon her? Claims might be made for more than those twenty pounds. "And you," she said, "do you know Lady Ongar?"

"I have not that honor myself."

"Oh, you have not; and do you want to be introduced?"

"Not exactly — not at present; at some future day I shall hope to have the pleasure. But I am right in believing that she and you are very intimate? Now what are you going to do for my friend Archie Clavering?"

"Oh-h-h!" exclaimed Sophie.

"Yes. What are you going to do for my friend Archie Clavering? Seventy pounds, you know, ma'am, is a smart bit of money!"

"A smart bit of money, is it? That is what you think on your leetle property down in Warwickshire."

"It isn't my property, ma'am, at all. It belongs to my uncle."

"Oh, it is your uncle that has the leetle property. And what had your uncle to do with Lady Ongar? What is your uncle to your friend Archie?"

"Nothing at all, ma'am; nothing on earth."

"Then why do you tell me all this rigmarole about your uncle and his leetle property, and Warwickshire? What have I to do with your uncle? Sir, I do not understand you — not at all. Nor do I know why I have the honor to see you here, Captain Bood-dle."

Even Doodles, redoubtable as he was — even he, with all his smartness, felt that he was overcome, and that this woman was too much for him. He was altogether perplexed, as he could not perceive whether in all her tirade about the little property she had really misunderstood him, and had in truth thought that he had been talking about his uncle, or whether the whole thing was cunning on her part. The reader, perhaps, will have a more correct idea of this lady than Captain Booodle had been able to obtain. She had now risen from her sofa, and was standing as though she expected him to go; but he had not as yet opened the budget of his business.

“I am here, ma’am,” said he, “to speak to you about my friend, Captain Clavering.”

“Then you can go back to your friend, and tell him I have nothing to say. And, more than that, Captain Booodle” — the woman intensified the name in a most disgusting manner, with the evident purpose of annoying him; of that he had become quite sure — “more than that, his sending you here is an impertinence. Will you tell him that?”

“No, ma’am, I will not.”

“Perhaps you are his laquais,” continued the inexhaustible Sophie, “and are obliged to come when he send you?”

“I am no man’s laquais, ma’am.”

“If so, I do not blame you; or, perhaps, it is your way to make your love third or fourth hand down in Warwickshire?”

“Damn Warwickshire!” said Doodles, who was put beyond himself.

“With all my heart. Damn Warwickshire.” And the horrid woman grinned at him as she repeated his words. “And the leetle property, and the uncle, if you wish it; and the leetle nephew — and the leetle nephew — and the leetle nephew!” She stood over him as she repeated the last words with wondrous rapidity, and grinned at him, and grimaced and shook herself, till Doodles was altogether bewildered. If this was a Russian spy he would avoid such in future, and keep himself for the milder acerbities of Newmarket, and the easier chaff of his club. He looked up into her face at the present moment, striving to think of some words by which he might assist himself. He had as yet performed no part of his mission, but any such performance was now entirely out of the question. The woman had defied him, and had altogether thrown Clavering over board. There was no further question of her services, and therefore he felt himself to be quite entitled to twit her with the payment she had taken.

“And how about my friend’s seventy pounds?” said he.

“How about seventy pounds! a leetle man comes here and tells me he is a Booodle in Warwickshire, and says he has an uncle with a very

leetle property, and asks me about seventy pounds! Suppose I ask you how about the policeman, what will you say then?"

"You send for him and you shall hear what I say."

"No; not to take away such a leetle man as you. I send for a policeman when I am afraid. Booddle in Warwickshire is not a terrible man. Suppose you go to your friend and tell him from me that he have chose a very bad Mercury in his affairs of love — the worst Mercury I ever see. Perhaps the Warwickshire Mercuries are not very good. Can you tell me, Captain Booddle, how they make love down in Warwickshire?"

"And that is all the satisfaction I am to have?"

"Who said you was to have satisfaction? Very little satisfaction I should think you ever have, when you come as a Mercury."

"My friend means to know something about that seventy pounds."

"Seventy pounds! If you talk to me anymore of seventy pounds, I will fly at your face." As she spoke this she jumped across at him as though she were really on the point of attacking him with her nails, and he, in dismay, retreated to the door. "You, and your seventy pounds! Oh, you English! What mean mens you are! Oh! a Frenchman would despise to do it. Yes; or a Russian or a Pole. But you — you want it all down in black and white like a butcher's heel. You know nothing, and understand nothing, and can never speak, and can never hold your tongues. You have no head, but the head of a bull. A bull can break all the china in a shop — dash, smash, crash — all the pretty things gone in a minute! So can an Englishman. Your seventy pounds! You will come again to me for seventy pounds, I think." In her energy she had acted the bull, and had exhibited her idea of the dashing, the smashing and the crashing, by the motion of her head and the waving of her hands.

"And you decline to say anything about the seventy pounds?" said Doodles, resolving that his courage should not desert him.

Whereupon the divine Sophie laughed. "Ha, ha, ha! I see you have not got on any gloves, Captain Booddle."

"Gloves; no. I don't wear gloves."

"Nor your uncle with the leetle property in Warwickshire? Captain Clavering, he wears a glove. He is a handy man." Doodles stared at her, understanding nothing of this. "Perhaps it is in your waistcoat pocket," and she approached him fearlessly, as though she were about to deprive him of his watch.

"I don't know what you mean," said he, retreating.

"Ah, you are not a handy man, like my friend the other captain, so you had better go away. Yes; you had better go to Warwickshire. In Warwickshire, I suppose, they make ready for your Michaelmas dinners. You have four months to get fat. Suppose you go away and get fat."

Doodles understood nothing of her sarcasm, but began to perceive that he might as well take his departure. The woman was probably a lunatic, and his friend Archie had no doubt been grossly deceived when he was sent to her for assistance. He had some faint idea that the seventy pounds might be recovered from such a madwoman, but in the recovery his friend would be exposed, and he saw that the money must be abandoned. At any rate he had not been soft enough to dispose of any more treasure.

"Good morning, ma'am," he said, very curtly.

"Good morning to you, Captain Booddle. Are you coming again another day?"

"Not that I know of, ma'am."

"You are very welcome to stay away. I like your friend the better. Tell him to come and be handy with his glove. As for you — suppose you go to the leetle property."

Then Captain Booddle went, and, as soon as he had made his way out into the open street, stood still and looked around him, that by the aspect of things familiar to his eyes he might be made certain that he was in a world with which he was conversant. While in that room with the spy he had ceased to remember that he was in London — his own London, within a mile of his club, within a mile of Tattersall's. He had been, as it were, removed to some strange world in which the tact, and courage, and acuteness natural to him had not been of avail to him. Madam Gordeloup had opened a new world to him — a new world of which he desired to make no further experience. Gradually he began to understand why he had been desired to prepare himself for Michaelmas eating. Gradually some idea about Archie's glove glimmered across his brain. A wonderful woman certainly was the Russian spy — a phenomenon which in future years he might perhaps be glad to remember that he had seen in the flesh. The first race-horse which he might ever own and name himself, he would certainly call the Russian Spy. In the meantime, as he slowly walked across Berkeley Square, he acknowledged to himself that she was not mad, and acknowledged also that the less said about that seventy pounds the better. From thence he crossed Piccadilly, and sauntered down St. James's Street into Pall Mall, revolving in his mind how he would carry himself with Clavvy. He, at any rate, had his ground for triumph. He had parted with no money, and had ascertained by his own wit that no available assistance from that quarter was to be had in the matter which his friend had in hand.

It was some hours after this when the two friends met, and at that time Doodles was up to his eyes in chalk and the profitable delights of pool. But Archie was too intent on his business to pay much regard to

his friend's proper avocation. "Well, Doodles," he said, hardly waiting till his ambassador had finished his stroke and laid his ball close waxed to one of the cushions. "Well; have you seen her?"

"Oh, yes; I've seen her," said Doodles, seating himself on an exalted bench which ran round the room, while Archie, with anxious eyes, stood before him.

"Well?" said Archie.

"She's a rum 'un. Thank 'ee, Griggs; you always stand to me like a brick." This was said to a young lieutenant who had failed to hit the captain's ball, and now tendered him a shilling with a very bitter look.

"She is queer," said Archie, "certainly."

"Queer! By George, I'll back her for the queerest bit of horseflesh going any way about these diggings. I thought she was mad at first, but I believe she knows what she's about."

"She knows what she's about well enough. . She's worth all the money if you can only get her to work."

"Bosh, my dear fellow."

"Why bosh? What's up now?"

"Bosh! Bosh! Bosh! Me to play, is it?" Down he went, and not finding a good open for a hazard, again waxed himself to the cushion, to the infinite disgust of Griggs, who did indeed hit the ball this time, but in such a way as to make the loss of another life from Griggs's original three a matter of certainty. "I don't think it's hardly fair," whispered Griggs to a friend, "a man playing always for safety. It's not the game I like, and I shan't play at the same table with Doodles anymore."

"It's all bosh," repeated Doodles, coming back to his seat. "She don't mean to do anything, and never did. I've found her out."

"Found out what?"

"She's been laughing at you. She got your money out from under your glove, didn't she?"

"Well, I did put it there."

"Of course, you did. I knew that I should find out what was what if I once went there. I got it all out of her. But, by George, what a woman she is! She swore at me to my very face."

"Swore at you! In French, you mean?"

"No; not in French at all, but damned me in downright English. By George, how I did laugh! — me and everybody belonging to me. I'm blessed if she didn't."

"There was nothing like that about her when I saw her."

"You didn't turn her inside out as I've done; but stop half a moment." Then he descended, chalked away at his cue hastily, pocketed a shilling or two, and returned. "You didn't turn her inside out as I've done. I tell

you, Clavvy, there's nothing to be done there, and there never was. If you'd kept on going yourself she'd have drained you as dry — as dry as that table. There's your thirty pounds back, and, upon my word, old fellow, you ought to thank me."

Archie did thank him, and Doodles was not without his triumph. Of the frequent references to Warwickshire which he had been forced to endure, he said nothing, nor yet of the reference to Michaelmas dinners; and, gradually, as he came to talk frequently to Archie of the Russian spy, and perhaps also to one or two others of his more intimate friends, he began to convince himself that he really had wormed the truth out of Madam Gordeloup, and got altogether the better of that lady, in a very wonderful way.

Chapter XXXVI

Harry Clavering's Confession

*H*arry Clavering, when he went away from Onslow Crescent, after his interview with Cecilia Burton, was a wretched, pitiable man. He had told the truth of himself as far as he was able to tell it, to a woman whom he thoroughly esteemed, and having done so was convinced that she could no longer entertain any respect for him. He had laid bare to her all his weakness, and for a moment she had spurned him. It was true that she had again reconciled herself to him, struggling to save both him and her sister from future misery — that she had even condescended to implore him to be gracious to Florence, taking that which to her mind seemed then to be the surest path to her object; but not the less did he feel that she must despise him. Having promised his hand to one woman — to a woman whom he still professed that he loved dearly — he had allowed himself to be cheated into offering it to another. And he knew that the cheating had been his own. It was he who had done the evil. Julia, in showing her affection for him, had tendered her love to a man whom she believed to be free. He had intended to walk straight.

He had not allowed himself to be enamored of the wealth possessed by this woman who had thrown herself at his feet. But he had been so weak that he had fallen in his own despite.

There is, I suppose, no young man possessed of average talents and average education, who does not early in life lay out for himself some career with more or less precision — some career which is high in its tendencies and noble in its aspirations, and to which he is afterward compelled to compare the circumstances of the life which he shapes for himself. In doing this he may not attempt, perhaps, to lay down for himself any prescribed amount of success which he will endeavor to reach, or even the very pathway by which he will strive to be successful; but he will tell himself what are the vices which he will avoid, and what the virtues which he will strive to attain. Few young men ever did this with more precision than it had been done by Harry Clavering, and few with more self-confidence. Very early in life he had been successful — so successful as to enable him to emancipate himself not only from his father's absolute control, but almost also from any interference on his father's part. It had seemed to be admitted that he was a better man than his father, better than the other Claverings — the jewel of the race, the Clavering to whom the family would in future years look up, not as their actual head, but as their strongest prop and most assured support. He had said to himself that he would be an honest, truthful, hard-working man, not covetous after money, though conscious that a laborer was worthy of his hire, and conscious also that the better the work done the better should be his wages. Then he had encountered a blow — a heavy blow from a false woman — and he had boasted to himself that he had borne it well, as a man should bear all blows. And now, after all these resolves and all these boastings, he found himself brought by his own weakness to such a pass that he hardly dared to look in the face any of his dearest and most intimate friends.

He was not remiss in telling himself all this. He did draw the comparison ruthlessly between the character which he had intended to make his own and that which he now had justly earned. He did not excuse himself. We are told to love others as ourselves, and it is hard to do so. But I think that we never hate others, never despise others, as we are sometimes compelled by our own convictions and self-judgment to hate and to despise ourselves. Harry, as he walked home on this evening, was lost in disgust at his own conduct. He could almost have hit his head against the walls, or thrown himself beneath the wagons as he passed them, so thoroughly was he ashamed of his own life. Even now, on this evening, he had escaped from Onslow Crescent — basely escaped — without having declared any purpose. Twice on this day he had

escaped, almost by subterfuges; once from Burton's office, and now again from Cecilia's presence. How long was this to go on, or how could life be endurable to him under such circumstances?

In parting from Cecilia, and promising to write at once, and promising to come again in a few days, he had had some idea in his head that he would submit his fate to the arbitrament of Lady Ongar. At any rate he must, he thought, see her, and finally arrange with her what the fate of both of them should be, before he could make any definite statement of his purpose in Onslow Crescent. The last tender of his hand had been made to Julia, and he could not renew his former promises on Florence's behalf, till he had been absolved by Julia.

This may at any rate be pleaded on his behalf — that in all the workings of his mind at this time there was very little of personal vanity. Very personally vain he had been when Julia Brabazon — the beautiful and noble-born Julia — had first confessed at Clavering that she loved him; but that vanity had been speedily knocked on its head by her conduct to him. Men when they are jilted can hardly be vain of the conquest which has led to such a result. Since that there had been no vanity of that sort. His love to Florence had been open, honest and satisfactory, but he had not considered himself to have achieved a wonderful triumph at Stratton. And when he found that Lord Ongar's widow still loved him — that he was still regarded with affection by the woman who had formerly wounded him — there was too much of pain, almost of tragedy, in his position, to admit of vanity. He would say to himself that, as far as he knew his own heart, he thought he loved Julia the best; but, nevertheless, he thoroughly wished that she had not returned from Italy, or that he had not seen her when she had so returned.

He had promised to write, and that he would do this very night. He had failed to make Cecilia Burton understand what he intended to do, having, indeed, hardly himself resolved; but before he went to bed he would both resolve and explain to her his resolution. Immediately, therefore, on his return home he sat down at his desk with the pen in his hand and the paper before him.

At last the words came. I can hardly say that they were the product of any fixed resolve made before he commenced the writing. I think that his mind worked more fully when the pen was in his hands than it had done during the hour through which he sat listless, doing nothing, struggling to have a will of his own, but failing. The letter when it was written was as follows:

BLOOMSBURY SQUARE, May, 186—

DEAREST MRS. BURTON: —

I said that I would write tomorrow, but I am writing now, immediately on my return home. Whatever else you may think of me, pray be sure of this, that I am most anxious to make you know and understand my own position at any rate as well as I do myself. I tried to explain it to you when I was with you this evening, but I fear that I failed; and when Mr. Burton came in I could not say anything further.

I know that I have behaved very badly to your sister — very badly, even though she should never become aware that I have done so. Not that that is possible, for if she were to be my wife tomorrow I should tell her everything. But badly as you must think of me, I have never for a moment had a premeditated intention to deceive her. I believe you do know on what terms I had stood with Miss Brabazon before her marriage, and that when she married, whatever my feelings might be, there was no self-accusation. And after that you know all that took place between me and Florence till the return of Lord Ongar's widow. Up to that time everything had been fair between us. I had told Florence of my former attachment, and she probably thought but little of it. Such things are so common with men! Some change happens as had happened with me, and a man's second love is often stronger and more worthy of a woman's acceptance than the first. At any rate, she knew it, and there was, so far, an end of it. And you understood, also, how very anxious I was to avoid delay in our marriage. No one knows that better than you — not even Florence — for I have talked it over with you so often; and you will remember how I have begged you to assist me. I don't blame my darling Florence. She was doing what she deemed best; but oh, if she had only been guided by what you once said to her!

Then Lord Ongar's widow returned; and dear Mrs. Burton, though I fear you think ill of her, you must remember that as far as you know, or I, she has done nothing wrong, has been in no respect false, since her marriage. As to her early conduct to me, she did what many women have done, but what no woman should do. But how can I blame her, knowing how terrible has been my own weakness! But as to her conduct since her marriage, I implore you to believe with me that she has been sinned against grievously, and has not sinned. Well; as you know, I met her. It was hardly unnatural that I should do so, as we are connected. But whether natural or unnatural, foolish or wise, I went to her often. I thought at first that she must know of my engagement, as her sister knew it well, and had met Florence. But she did not know it; and so,

having none near her that she could love, hardly a friend but myself, grievously wronged by the world and her own relatives, thinking that with her wealth she could make some amends to me for her former injury, she —. Dear Mrs. Burton, I think you will understand it now, and will see that she at least is free from blame.

I am not defending myself; of course, all this should have been without effect on me. But I had loved her so dearly! I do love her still so dearly! Love like that does not die. When she left me it was natural that I should seek someone else to love. When she returned to me — when I found that in spite of her faults she had loved me through it all, I — I yielded and became false and a traitor.

I say that I love her still; but I know well that Florence is far the nobler woman of the two. Florence never could have done what she did. In nature, in mind, in acquirement, in heart, Florence is the better. The man who marries Florence must be happy if any woman can make a man happy. Of her of whom I am now speaking, I know well that I cannot say that. How then, you will ask, can I be fool enough, having had such a choice, to doubt between the two! How is it that man doubts between vice and virtue, between heaven and hell?

But all this is nothing to you. I do not know whether Florence would take me now. I am well aware that I have no right to expect that she should. But if I understood you aright this evening, she, as yet, has heard nothing of all this. What must she think of me for not writing to her! But I could not bring myself to write in a false spirit; and how could I tell her all that I have now told to you?

I know that you wish that our engagement should go on. Dear Mrs. Burton, I love you so dearly for wishing it! Mr. Burton, when he shall have heard everything, will, I fear, think differently. For me, I feel that I must see Lady Ongar before I can again go to your house, and I write now chiefly to tell you that this is what I have determined to do. I believe she is now away, in the Isle of Wight, but I will see her as soon as she returns. After that I will either come to Onslow Crescent or send. Florence will be with you then. She, of course, must know everything, and you have my permission to show this letter to her if you think well to do so. Most sincerely and affectionately yours,

HARRY CLAVERING

This he delivered himself the next morning at the door in Onslow Crescent, taking care not to be there till after Theodore Burton should have gone from home. He left a card also, so that it might be known,

not only that he had brought it himself but that he intended Mrs. Burton to be aware of that fact. Then he went and wandered about, and passed his day in misery, as such men do when they are thoroughly discontented with their own conduct. This was the Saturday on which Lady Ongar returned with her Sophie from the Isle of Wight; but of that premature return Harry knew nothing, and therefore allowed the Sunday to pass by without going to Bolton Street. On the Monday morning he received a letter from home which made it necessary — or induced him to suppose it to be necessary — that he should go home to Clavering, at any rate for one day. This he did on the Monday, sending a line to Mrs. Burton to say whither he was gone, and that he should be back by Wednesday night or Thursday morning — and imploring her to give his love to Florence, if she would venture to do so. Mrs. Burton would know what must be his first business in London on his return, and she might be sure he would come or send to Onslow Crescent as soon as that was over.

Harry's letter — the former and longer letter, Cecilia had read over, till she nearly knew it by heart, before her husband's return. She well understood that he would be very hard upon Harry. He had been inclined to forgive Clavering for what had been remiss — to forgive the silence, the absence from the office, and the want of courtesy to his wife, till Harry had confessed his sin — but he could not endure that his sister should seek the hand of a man who had declared himself to be in doubt whether he would take it, or that anyone should seek it for her, in her ignorance of all the truth. His wife, on the other hand, simply looked to Florence's comfort and happiness. That Florence should not suffer the pang of having been deceived and rejected was all in all to Cecilia. "Of course she must know it some day," the wife had pleaded to her husband. "He is not the man to keep anything secret. But if she is told when he has returned to her, and is good to her, the happiness of the return will cure the other misery." But Burton would not submit to this. "To be comfortable at present is not everything," he said. "If the man be so miserably weak that he does not even now know his own mind, Florence had better take her punishment, and be quit of him."

Cecilia had narrated to him with passable fidelity what had occurred upstairs, while he was sitting alone in the dining room. That she in her anger had at one moment spurned Harry Clavering, and that in the next she had knelt to him, imploring him to come back to Florence — those two little incidents she did not tell to her husband. Harry's adventures with Lady Ongar, as far as she knew them, she described accurately. "I can't make any apology for him; upon my life I can't," said Burton. "If I know what it is for a man to behave ill, falsely, like a

knave in such matters, he is so behaving." So Theodore Burton spoke as he took his candle to go away to his work; but his wife had induced him to promise that he would not write to Stratton or take any other step in the matter till they had waited twenty-four hours for Harry's promised letter.

The letter came before the twenty-four hours were expired, and Burton, on his return home on the Saturday, found himself called upon to read and pass judgment upon Harry's confession. "What right has he to speak of her as his darling Florence," he exclaimed, "while he is confessing his own knavery?"

"But if she is his darling — ?" pleaded his wife.

"Trash! But the word from him in such a letter is simply an additional insult. And what does he know about this woman who has come back? He vouches for her, but what can he know of her? Just what she tells him. He is simply a fool."

"But you cannot dislike him for believing her word."

"Cecilia," said he, holding down the letter as he spoke — "you are so carried away by your love for Florence, and your fear lest a marriage which has been once talked of should not take place, that you shut your eyes to this man's true character. Can you believe any good of a man who tells you to your face that he is engaged to two women at once?"

"I think I can," said Cecilia, hardly venturing to express so dangerous an opinion above her breath.

"And what would you think of a woman who did so?"

"Ah, that is so different! I cannot explain it, but you know that it is different."

"I know that you would forgive a man anything, and a woman nothing." To this she submitted in silence, having probably heard the reproof before, and he went on to finish the letter. "Not defending himself!" he exclaimed — "then why does he not defend himself? When a man tells me that he does not, or cannot defend himself I know that he is a sorry fellow, without a spark of spirit."

"I don't think that of Harry. Surely that letter shows a spirit."

"Such a one as I should be ashamed to see in a dog. No man should ever be in a position in which he cannot defend himself. No man, at any rate, should admit himself to be so placed. Wish that he should go on with his engagement! I do not wish it at all. I am sorry for Florence. She will suffer terribly. But the loss of such a lover as that is infinitely a lesser loss than would be the gain of such a husband. You had better write to Florence, and tell her not to come."

"Oh, Theodore!"

"That is my advice."

"But there is no post between this and Monday," said Cecilia temporizing.

"Send her a message by the wires."

"You cannot explain this by a telegram, Theodore. Besides, why should she not come? Her coming can do no harm. If you were to tell your mother now of all this, it would prevent the possibility of things ever being right."

"Things — that is, this thing, never will be right," said he.

"But let us see. She will be here on Monday, and if you think it best you can tell her everything. Indeed, she must be told when she is here, for I could not keep it from her. I could not smile and talk to her about him and make her think that it is all right."

"Not you! I should be very sorry if you could."

"But I think I could make her understand that she should not decide upon breaking with him altogether."

"And I think I could make her understand that she ought to do so."

"But you wouldn't do that, Theodore?"

"I would if I thought it my duty."

"But at any rate, she must come, and we can talk of that tomorrow."

As to Florence's coming, Burton had given way, beaten, apparently, by that argument about the post. On the Sunday very little was said about Harry Clavering. Cecilia studiously avoided the subject, and Burton had not so far decided on dropping Harry altogether as to make him anxious to express any such decision. After all, such dropping or not dropping must be the work of Florence herself. On the Monday morning Cecilia had a further triumph. On that day her husband was very fully engaged — having to meet a synod of contractors, surveyors and engineers, to discuss which of the remaining thoroughfares of London should not be knocked down by the coming railways — and he could not absent himself from the Adelphi. It was, therefore, arranged that Mrs. Burton should go to the Paddington Station to meet her sister-in-law. She therefore would have the first word with Florence, and the earliest opportunity of impressing the newcomer with her own ideas. "Of course, you must say something to her of this man," said her husband, "but the less you say the better. After all, she must be left to judge for herself." In all matters such as this — in all affairs of tact, of social intercourse, and of conduct between man and man, or man and woman, Mr. Burton was apt to be eloquent in his domestic discussion, and sometimes almost severe; but the final arrangement of them was generally left to his wife. He enunciated principles of strategy — much, no doubt, to her benefit; but she actually fought the battles.

Chapter XXXVII

Florence Burton's Return

Though nobody had expressed to Florence at Stratton any fear of Harry Clavering's perfidy, that young lady was not altogether easy in her mind. Weeks and weeks had passed, and she had not heard from him. Her mother was manifestly uneasy, and had announced some days before Florence's departure, her surprise and annoyance in not having heard from her eldest son. When Florence inquired as to the subject of the expected letter, her mother put the question aside, saying, with a little assumed irritability, that of course she liked to get an answer to her letters when she took the trouble to write them. And when the day for Florence's journey drew nigh, the old lady became more and more uneasy — showing plainly that she wished her daughter was not going to London. But Florence, as she was quite determined to go, said nothing to all this. Her father also was uneasy, and neither of them had for some days named her lover in her hearing. She knew that there was something wrong, and felt that it was better that she should go to London and learn the truth.

No female heart was ever less prone to suspicion than the heart of Florence Burton. Among those with whom she had been most intimate nothing had occurred to teach her that men could be false, or women either. When she had heard from Harry Clavering the story of Julia Brabazon, she had, not making much accusation against the sinner in speech, put Julia down in the books of her mind as a bold, bad woman, who could forget her sex, and sell her beauty and her womanhood for money. There might be such a woman here and there, or such a man. There were murderers in the world — but the bulk of mankind is not made subject to murderers. Florence had never considered the possibility that she herself could become liable to such a misfortune. And then, when the day came that she was engaged, her confidence in the man chosen by her was unlimited. Such love as hers rarely suspects. He with whom she had to do was Harry Clavering, and therefore she could not

be deceived. Moreover, she was supported by a self-respect and a self-confidence which did not at first allow her to dream that a man who had once loved her would ever wish to leave her. It was to her as though a sacrament as holy as that of the church had passed between them, and she could not easily bring herself to think that that sacrament had been as nothing to Harry Clavering. But nevertheless there was something wrong, and when she left her father's house at Stratton, she was well aware that she must prepare herself for tidings that might be evil. She could bear anything, she thought, without disgracing herself; but there were tidings which might send her back to Stratton a broken woman, fit perhaps to comfort the declining years of her father and mother, but fit for nothing else.

Her mother watched her closely as she sat at her breakfast that morning, but much could not be gained by watching Florence Burton when Florence wished to conceal her thoughts. Many messages were sent to Theodore, to Cecilia, and to the children, messages to others of the Burton clan who were in town, but not a word was said of Harry Clavering. The very absence of his name was enough to make them all wretched, but Florence bore it as the Spartan boy bore the fox beneath his tunic. Mrs. Burton could hardly keep herself from a burst of indignation; but she had been strongly warned by her husband, and restrained herself till Florence was gone. "If he is playing her false," said she, as soon as she was alone with her old husband, "he shall suffer for it, though I have to tear his face with my own fingers."

"Nonsense, my dear; nonsense."

"It is not nonsense, Mr. Burton. A gentleman, indeed! He is to be allowed to be dishonest to my girl because he is a gentleman! I wish there was no such thing as a gentleman; — so I do. Perhaps there would be more honest men then." It was unendurable to her that a girl of hers should be so treated.

Immediately on the arrival of the train at the London platform, Florence espied Cecilia, and in a minute was in her arms. There was a special tenderness in her sister-in-law's caress, which at once told Florence that her fears had not been without cause. Who has not felt the evil tidings conveyed by the exaggerated tenderness of a special kiss? But while on the platform and among the porters she said nothing of herself. She asked after Theodore and heard of the railway confederacy with a show of delight. "He'd like to make a line from Hyde Park Corner to the Tower of London," said Florence, with a smile. Then she asked after the children, and specially for the baby; but as yet she spoke no word of Harry Clavering. The trunk and the bag were at last found; and the two ladies were packed into a cab, and had started. Cecilia, when

they were seated, got hold of Florence's hand, and pressed it warmly. "Dearest," said she, "I am so glad to have you with us once again." "And now," said Florence, speaking with a calmness that was almost unnatural, "tell me all the truth."

All the truth! What a demand it was. And yet Cecilia had expected that none less would be made upon her. Of course Florence must have known that there was something wrong. Of course she would ask as to her lover immediately upon her arrival. "And now tell me all the truth."

"Oh, Florence!"

"The truth, then, is very bad?" said Florence, gently. "Tell me first of all whether you have seen him. Is he ill?"

"He was with us on Friday. He is not ill."

"Thank God for that. Has anything happened to him? Has he lost money?"

"No; I have heard nothing about money."

"Then he is tired of me. Tell me at once, my own one. You know me so well. I can bear it. Don't treat me like a coward."

"No; it is not that. It is not that he is tired of you. If you had heard him speak of you on Friday — that you were the noblest, purest, dearest, best of women —" This was imprudent on her part; but what loving woman could have endured to be prudent?

"Then what is it?" asked Florence, almost sternly. "Look here, Cecilia; if it be anything touching himself or his own character, I will put up with it, in spite of anything my brother may say. Though he had been a murderer, if that were possible, I would not leave him. I never will, unless he leaves me. Where is he?"

"He is in town." Mrs. Burton had not received Harry's note, telling her of his journey to Clavering, before she had left home. Now, at this moment, it was waiting for her in Onslow Crescent.

"And am I to see him? Cecilia why cannot you tell me how it is? In such a case I should tell you — should tell you everything at once; because I know that you are not a coward. Why cannot you do so to me?"

"You have heard of Lady Ongar?"

"Heard of her; yes. She treated Harry very badly before her marriage."

"She has come back to London, a widow."

"I know she has. And Harry has gone back to her! Is that it? Do you mean to tell me that Harry and she are to be married?"

"No; I cannot say that. I hope it is not so. Indeed, I do not think it."

"Then what have I to fear? Does she object to his marrying me? What has she to do between us?"

"She wishes that Harry should come back to her, and Harry has been unsteady. He has been with her often, and he has been very weak. It may be all right yet, Flo; it may indeed — if you can forgive his weakness."

Something of the truth had now come home to Florence, and she sat thinking of it long before she spoke again. This widow, she knew, was very wealthy, and Harry had loved her before he had come to Stratton. Harry's first love had come back free — free to wed again, and able to make the fortune of the man she might love and marry. What had Florence to give to any man that could be weighed with this? Lady Ongar was very rich. Florence had already heard all this from Harry — was very rich, was clever, and was beautiful; and moreover, she had been Harry's first love. Was it reasonable that she, with her little claims, her puny attractions, should stand in Harry's way when such a prize as that came across him! And as for his weakness; might it not be strength, rather than weakness; the strength of an old love which he could not quell, now that the woman was free to take him? For herself — had she not known that she had only come second? As she thought of him with his noble bride and that bride's great fortune, and of her own insignificance, her low birth, her doubtful prettiness — prettiness that had ever been doubtful to herself of her few advantages, she told herself that she had no right to stand upon her claims. "I wish I had known it sooner," she said, in a voice so soft that Cecilia strained her ears to catch the words. "I wish I had known it sooner. I would not have come up to be in his way."

"But you will be in no one's way, Flo, unless it be in hers."

"And I will not be in hers," said Florence, speaking somewhat louder, and raising her head in pride as she spoke. "I will be neither in hers nor in his. I think I will go back at once."

Cecilia upon this ventured to look around at her, and saw that she was very pale, but that her eyes were dry and her lips pressed close together. It had not occurred to Mrs. Burton that her sister-in-law would take it in this way, that she would be willing to give way, and at once surrender her lover to her rival. No one liked success better than Cecilia Burton, and to her success would consist in rescuing Harry from Lady Ongar and securing him for Florence. In fighting this battle she had found that she would have against her Lady Ongar, of course, and then her husband, and Harry himself too, as she feared; and now she must reckon Florence also among her opponents. But she could not endure the idea of failing in such a cause. "Oh, Florence, I think you are so wrong," she said.

"You would feel as I do, if you were in my place."

"But people cannot always judge best when they feel the most. What you should think of is his happiness."

"So I do; and of his future career."

"Career! I hate to hear of careers. Men do not want careers, or should not want them. Could it be good for him to marry a woman who has done as she has, simply because she has made herself rich by her wickedness? Do you believe so much in riches yourself?"

"If he loves her best, I will not blame him," said Florence. "He knew her before he had seen me. He was quite honest and told me all the story. It is not his fault if he still likes her the best."

Chapter XXXVIII

Florence Burton Makes Up A Packet

When they reached Onslow Crescent, the first half-hour was spent with the children, as to whom Florence could but observe that even from their mouths the name of Harry Clavering was banished. But she played with Cissy and Sophie, giving them their little presents from Stratton; and sat with the baby in her lap, kissing his pink feet and making little soft noises for his behalf sweetly as she might have done if no terrible crisis in her own life had now come upon her. Not a tear as yet had moistened her eyes, and Cecilia was partly aware that Florence's weeping would be done in secret. "Come up with me into my own room; I have something to show you," she said, as the nurse took the baby at last; and Cissy and Sophie were at the same time sent away with their brother. "As I came in I got a note from Harry, but, before you see that, I must show you the letter which he wrote to me on Friday. He has gone down to Clavering — on some business — for one day." Mrs. Burton, in her heart, could hardly acquit him of having run out of town at the moment to avoid the arrival of Florence.

They went upstairs, and the note was, in fact, read before the letter. "I hope there is nothing wrong at the parsonage," said Florence.

"You see he says he will come back after one day."

"Perhaps he has gone to tell them — of this change in his prospects."

"No, dear, no; you do not yet understand his feelings. Read his letter, and you will know more. If there is to be a change, he is at any rate too much ashamed of it to speak of it. He does not wish it himself. It is simply this — that she has thrown herself in his way, and he has not known how to avoid her."

Then Florence read the letter very slowly, going over most of the sentences more than once, and struggling to learn from them what were really the wishes of the writer. When she came to Harry's exculpation of Lady Ongar, she believed it thoroughly, and said so — meeting, however, a direct contradiction on that point from her sister-in-law. When she had finished it, she folded it up and gave it back. "Cissy," she said, "I know that I ought to go back. I do not want to see him, and I am glad that he has gone away."

"But you do not mean to give him up?"

"Yes, dearest."

"But you said you would never leave him, unless he left you."

"He has left me."

"No, Florence; not so. Do you not see what he says; that he knows you are the only woman that can make him happy?"

"He has not said that; but if he had, it would be no matter. He understands well how it is. He says that I could not take him now — even if he came to me; and I cannot. How could I? What! wish to marry a man who does not love me, who loves another, when I know that I am regarded simply as a barrier between them; when by doing so I should mar his fortunes? Cissy, dear, when you think of it, you will not wish it."

"Mar his fortunes! It would make them. I do wish it — and he wishes it too. I tell you that I had him here, and I know it. Why should you be sacrificed?"

"What is the meaning of self-denial, if no one can bear to suffer?"

"But he will suffer too — and all for her caprices! You cannot really think that her money would do him any good. Who would ever speak to him again, or even see him? What would the world say of him? Why, his own father and mother and sisters would disown him, if they are such as you say they are."

Florence would not argue it further, but went to her room, and remained there alone till Cecilia came to tell her that her brother had returned. What weeping there may have been there, need not be told. Indeed, as I think, there was not much, for Florence was a girl whose education had not brought her into the way of hysterical sensations.

The Burtons were an active, energetic people, who sympathized with each other in labor and success — and in endurance also; but who had little sympathy to express for the weaknesses of grief. When her children had stumbled in their play, bruising their little noses, and barking their little shins, Mrs. Burton, the elder, had been wont to bid them rise, asking them what their legs were for, if they could not stand. So they had dried their own little eyes with their own little fists, and had learned to understand that the rubs of the world were to be borne in silence. This rub that had come to Florence was of grave import, and had gone deeper than the outward skin; but still the old lesson had its effect.

Florence rose from the bed on which she was lying, and prepared to come down. "Do not commit yourself to him, as to anything," said Cecilia.

"I understand what that means," Florence answered. "He thinks as I do. But never mind. He will not say much, and I shall say less. It is bad to talk of this to any man — even to a brother."

Burton also received his sister with that exceptional affection which declares pity for some overwhelming misfortune. He kissed her lips, which was rare with him, for he would generally but just touch her forehead, and he put his hand behind her waist and partly embraced her. "Did Cissy manage to find you at the station?"

"Oh, yes; easily."

"Theodore thinks that a woman is no good for any such purpose as that," said Cecilia. "It is a wonder to him, no doubt, that we are not now wandering about London in search of each other — and of him."

"I think she would have got home quicker if I could have been there," said Burton.

"We were in a cab in one minute; weren't we, Florence? The difference would have been that you would have given a porter sixpence — and I gave him a shilling, having bespoken him before."

"And Theodore's time was worth the sixpence, I suppose," said Florence.

"That depends," said Cecilia. "How did the synod go on?"

"The synod made an ass of itself; as synods always do. It is necessary to get a lot of men together, for the show of the thing — otherwise the world will not believe. That is the meaning of committees. But the real work must always be done by one or two men. Come; I'll go and get ready for dinner."

The subject — the one real subject, had thus been altogether avoided at this first meeting with the man of the house, and the evening passed without any allusion to it. Much was made of the children, and much was said of the old people at home; but still there was a consciousness

over them all that the one matter of importance was being kept in the background. They were all thinking of Harry Clavering, but no one mentioned his name. They all knew that they were unhappy and heavy-hearted through his fault, but no one blamed him. He had been received in that house with open arms, had been warmed in their bosom, and had stung them; but though they were all smarting from the sting, they uttered no complaint. Burton had made up his mind that it would be better to pass over the matter thus in silence — to say nothing further of Harry Clavering. A misfortune had come upon them. They must bear it, and go on as before. Harry had been admitted into the London office on the footing of a paid clerk — on the same footing, indeed, as Burton himself though with a much smaller salary and inferior work. This position had been accorded to him of course through the Burton interest, and it was understood that if he chose to make himself useful, he could rise in the business as Theodore had risen. But he could only do so as one of the Burtons. For the last three months he had declined to take his salary, alleging that private affairs had kept him away from the office. It was to the hands of Theodore Burton himself that such matters came for management, and therefore there had been no necessity for further explanation. Harry Clavering would of course leave the house, and there would be an end of him in the records of the Burton family. He would have come and made his mark — a terrible mark, and would have passed on. Those whom he had bruised by his cruelty, and knocked over by his treachery, must get to their feet again as best they could, and say as little as might be of their fall. There are knaves in this world, and no one can suppose that he has a special right to be exempted from their knavery because he himself is honest. It is on the honest that the knaves prey. That was Burton's theory in this matter. He would learn from Cecilia how Florence was bearing herself; but to Florence herself he would say little or nothing if she bore with patience and dignity, as he believed she would, the calamity which had befallen her.

But he must write to his mother. The old people at Stratton must not be left in the dark as to what was going on. He must write to his mother, unless he could learn from his wife that Florence herself had communicated to them at home the fact of Harry's iniquity. But he asked no question as to this on the first night, and on the following morning he went off having simply been told that Florence had seen Harry's letter, that she knew all, and that she was carrying herself like an angel.

"Not like an angel that hopes?" said Theodore.

"Let her alone for a day or two," said Cecilia. "Of course she must have a few days to think of it. I need hardly tell you that you will never have to be ashamed of your sister."

The Tuesday and the Wednesday passed by, and though Cecilia and Florence when together discussed the matter, no change was made in the wishes or thoughts of either of them. Florence, now that she was in town, had consented to remain till after Harry should return, on the understanding that she should not be called upon to see him. He was to be told that she forgave him altogether — that his troth was returned to him and that he was free, but that in such circumstances a meeting between them could be of no avail. And then a little packet was made up, which was to be given to him. How was it that Florence had brought with her all his presents and all his letters? But there they were in her box up stairs, and sitting by herself with weary fingers, she packed them, and left them packed under lock and key, addressed by herself to Harry Clavering, Esq. Oh, the misery of packing such a parcel! The feeling with which a woman does it is never experienced by a man. He chucks the things together in wrath — the lock of hair, the letters in the pretty Italian hand that have taken so much happy care in the writing, the jeweled shirt-studs, which were first put in by the fingers that gave them. They are thrown together, and given to some other woman to deliver. But the girl lingers over her torture. She reads the letters again. She thinks of the moments of bliss which each little toy has given. She is loath to part with everything. She would fain keep someone thing — the smallest of them all. She doubts — till a feeling of maidenly reserve constrains her at last, and the coveted trifle, with careful, pains-taking fingers, is put with the rest, and the parcel is made complete, and the address is written with precision.

"Of course I cannot see him," said Florence. "You will hand to him what I have to send to him; and you must ask him, if he has kept any of my letters, to return them." She said nothing of the shirt-studs, but he would understand that. As for the lock of hair — doubtless it had been burned.

Cecilia said but little in answer to this. She would not as yet look upon the matter as Florence looked at it, and as Theodore did also. Harry was to be back in town on Thursday morning. He could not, probably, be seen or heard of on that day, because of his visit to Lady Ongar. It was absolutely necessary that he should see Lady Ongar before he could come to Onslow Terrace, with possibility of becoming once more the old Harry Clavering whom they were all to love. But Mrs. Burton would by no means give up all hope. It was useless to say anything to Florence, but she still hoped that good might come.

And then, as she thought of it all, a project came into her head. Alas, and alas! Was she not too late with her project? Why had she not thought of it on the Tuesday or early on the Wednesday, when it might possibly have been executed? But it was a project which she must have kept secret from her husband, of which he would by no means have approved; and as she remembered this, she told herself that perhaps it was as well that things should take their own course without such interference as she had contemplated.

On the Thursday morning there came to her a letter in a strange hand. It was from Clavering — from Harry's mother. Mrs. Clavering wrote, as she said, at her son's request, to say that he was confined to his bed, and could not be in London as soon as he expected. Mrs. Burton was not to suppose that he was really ill, and none of the family were to be frightened. From this Mrs. Burton learned that Mrs. Clavering knew nothing of Harry's apostasy. The letter went on to say that Harry would write as soon as he himself was able, and would probably be in London early next week — at any rate before the end of it. He was a little feverish, but there was no cause for alarm. Florence, of course, could only listen and turn pale. Now, at any rate, she must remain in London.

Mrs. Burton's project, might, after all, be feasible; but then what if her husband should really be angry with her? That was a misfortune which never yet had come upon her.

Chapter XXXIX

Showing Why Harry Clavering Was Wanted At The Rectory

The letter which had summoned Harry to the parsonage had been from his mother, and had begged him to come to Clavering at once, as trouble had come upon them from an unexpected source. His father had quarreled with Mr. Saul. The rector and the curate had had an interview, in which there had been high words, and Mr. Clavering had

refused to see Mr. Saul again. Fanny also was in great trouble — and the parish was, as it were, in hot water. Mrs. Clavering thought that Harry had better run down to Clavering, and see Mr. Saul. Harry, not unwillingly, acceded to his mother's request, much wondering at the source of this new misfortune. As to Fanny, she, as he believed, had held out no encouragement to Mr. Saul's overtures. When Mr. Saul had proposed to her — making that first offer of which Harry had been aware — nothing could have been more steadfast than her rejection of the gentleman's hand. Harry had regarded Mr. Saul as little less than mad to think of such a thing, but, thinking of him as a man very different in his ways and feelings from other men, had believed that he might go on at Clavering comfortably as curate in spite of that little accident. It appeared, however, that he was not going on comfortably; but Harry, when he left London, could not quite imagine how such violent discomfort should have arisen that the rector and the curate should be unable to meet each other. If the reader will allow me, I will go back a little and explain this.

The reader already knows what Fanny's brother did not know — namely, that Mr. Saul had pressed his suit again, and had pressed it very strongly; and he also knows that Fanny's reception of the second offer was very different from her reception of the first. She had begun to doubt — to doubt whether her first judgment as to Mr. Saul's character had not been unjust — to doubt whether, in addressing her, he was not right, seeing that his love for her was so strong — to doubt whether she did not like him better than she had thought she did — to doubt whether an engagement with a penniless curate was in truth a position utterly to be reprehended and avoided. Young penniless curates must love somebody as well as young beneficed vicars and rectors. And then Mr. Saul pleaded his cause so well!

She did not at once speak to her mother on the matter, and the fact that she had a secret made her very wretched. She had left Mr. Saul in doubt, giving him no answer, and he had said that he would ask her again in a few days what was to be his fate. She hardly knew how to tell her mother of this till she had told herself what were her own wishes. She thoroughly desired to have her mother in her confidence, and promised herself that it should be so before Mr. Saul renewed his suit. He was a man who was never hurried or impatient in his doings. But Fanny put off the interview with her mother, and put off her own final resolution, till it was too late, and Mr. Saul came upon her again, when she was but ill prepared for him.

A woman, when she doubts whether she loves or does not love, is inclined five parts out of six toward the man of whom she is thinking.

When a woman doubts she is lost, the cynics say. I simply assert, being no cynic, that when a woman doubts she is won. The more Fanny thought of Mr. Saul, the more she felt that he was not the man for whom she had first taken him — that he was of larger dimensions as regarded spirit, manhood and heart, and better entitled to a woman's love. She would not tell herself that she was attached to him; but in all her arguments with herself against him, she rested her objection mainly on the fact that he had but seventy pounds a year. And then the threatened attack, the attack that was to be final, came upon her before she was prepared for it!

They had been together as usual during the intervening time. It was, indeed, impossible that they should not be together. Since she had first begun to doubt about Mr. Saul, she had been more diligent than heretofore in visiting the poor and in attending to her school, as though she were recognizing the duty which would specially be hers if she were to marry such a one as he. And thus they had been brought together more than ever. All this her mother had seen, and seeing, had trembled; but she had not thought it wise to say anything till Fanny should speak. Fanny was very good and very prudent. It could not be but that Fanny should know how impossible must be such a marriage. As to the rector, he had no suspicions on the matter. Saul had made himself an ass on one occasion, and there had been an end of it. As a curate, Saul was invaluable, and therefore the fact of his having made himself an ass had been forgiven him. It was thus that the rector looked at it.

It was hardly more than ten days since the last walk in Cumberly Lane when Mr. Saul renewed the attack. He did it again on the same spot, and at the same hour of the day. Twice a week, always on the same days, he was in the chapel up at this end of the parish, and on these days he could always find Fanny on her way home. When he put his head in at the little school door and asked for her, her mind misgave her. He had not walked home with her since, and though he had been in the school with her often, had always left her there, going about his own business, as though he were by no means desirous of her company. Now the time had come, and Fanny felt that she was not prepared. But she took up her hat, and went out to him, knowing that there was no escape.

"So Miss Clavering," said he, "have you thought of what I was saying to you?" To this she made no answer, but merely played with the point of the parasol which she held in her hand. "You cannot but have thought of it," he continued. "You could not dismiss it altogether from your thoughts."

"I have thought about it, of course," she said.

"And what does your mind say? Or rather what does your heart say? Both should speak, but I would sooner hear the heart first."

"I am sure, Mr. Saul, that it is quite impossible."

"In what way impossible?"

"Papa would not allow it."

"Have you asked him?"

"Oh, dear, no."

"Or Mrs. Clavering?"

Fanny blushed as she remembered how she had permitted the days to go by without asking her mother's counsel. "No; I have spoken to no one. Why should I, when I knew that it is impossible?"

"May I speak to Mr. Clavering?" To this Fanny made no immediate answer, and then Mr. Saul urged the question again. "May I speak to your father?"

Fanny felt that she was assenting, even in that she did not answer such a question by an immediate refusal of her permission; and yet she did not mean to assent. "Miss Clavering," he said, "if you regard me with affection, you have no right to refuse me this request. I tell you so boldly. If you feel for me that love which would enable you to accept me as your husband, it is your duty to tell me so — your duty to me, to yourself and to your God."

Fanny did not quite see the thing in this light, and yet she did not wish to contradict him. At this moment she forgot that in order to put herself on perfectly firm ground, she should have gone back to the first hypothesis, and assured him that she did not feel any such regard for him. Mr. Saul, whose intellect was more acute, took advantage of her here, and chose to believe that that matter of her affection was now conceded to him. He knew what he was doing well, and is open to a charge of some jesuitry. "Mr. Saul," said Fanny, with grave prudence, "it cannot be right for people to marry when they have nothing to live upon." When she had shown him so plainly that she had no other piece left on the board to play than this, the game may be said to have been won on his side.

"If that be your sole objection," said he, "you cannot but think it right that I and your father should discuss it." To this she made no reply whatever, and they walked along the lane for a considerable way in silence. Mr. Saul would have been glad to have had the interview over now, feeling that at any future meeting he would have stronger power of assuming the position of an accepted lover than he would do now. Another man would have desired to get from her lips a decided word of love — to take her hand, perhaps, and to feel some response from it — to go further than this, as is not unlikely, and plead for the happy

indulgences of an accepted lover. But Mr. Saul abstained, and was wise in abstaining. She had not so far committed herself but that she might even now have drawn back, had he pressed her too hard. For hand-pressing, and the titillations of love-making, Mr. Saul was not adapted; but he was a man who, having once loved, would love on to the end.

The way, however, was too long to be completed without further speech. Fanny, as she walked, was struggling to find some words by which she might still hold her ground, but the words were not forthcoming. It seemed to herself that she was being carried away by this man, because she had suddenly lost her remembrance of all negatives. The more she struggled the more she failed, and at last gave it up in despair. Let Mr. Saul say what he would, it was impossible that they should be married. All his arguments about duty were nonsense. It could not be her duty to marry a man who would have to starve in his attempt to keep her. She wished she had told him at first that she did not love him, but that seemed to be too late now. The moment that she was in the house she would go to her mother and tell her everything.

"Miss Clavering," said he, "I shall see your father tomorrow."

"No, no," she ejaculated.

"I shall certainly do so in any event. I shall either tell him that I must leave the parish — explaining to him why I must go; or I shall ask him to let me remain herein the hope that I may become his son-in-law. You will not now tell me that I am to go?" Fanny was again silent, her memory failing her as to either negative or affirmative that would be of service. "To stay here hopeless would be impossible to me. Now I am not hopeless. Now I am full of hope. I think I could be happy, though I had to wait as Jacob waited."

"And perhaps have Jacob's consolation," said Fanny. She was lost by the joke and he knew it. A grim smile of satisfaction crossed his thin face as he heard it, and there was a feeling of triumph at his heart. "I am hardly fitted to be a patriarch, as the patriarchs were of old," he said. "Though the seven years should be prolonged to fourteen, I do not think I should seek any Leah."

They were soon at the gate, and his work for that evening was done. He would go home to his solitary room at a neighboring farmhouse, and sit in triumph as he eat his morsel of cold mutton by himself. He, without any advantages of person to back him, poor, friendless, hitherto conscious that he was unfitted to mix even in ordinary social life — he had won the heart of the fairest woman he had ever seen. "You will give me your hand at parting," he said, whereupon she tendered it to him with her eyes fixed upon the ground. "I hope we understand each other," he continued. "You may at any rate understand this, that I love you with

all my heart and all my strength. If things prosper with me, all my prosperity shall be for you. If there be no prosperity for me, you shall be my only consolation in this world. You are my Alpha and my Omega, my first and last, my beginning and end — my everything, my all." Then he turned away and left her, and there had come no negative from her lips. As far as her lips were concerned, no negative was any longer possible to her.

She went into the house knowing that she must at once seek her mother but she allowed herself first to remain for some half — hour in her own bedroom, preparing the words that she would use. The interview she knew would be difficult — much more difficult than it would have been before her last walk with Mr. Saul; and the worst of it was that she could not quite make up her mind as to what it was that she wished to say. She waited till she could hear her mother's step on the stairs. At last Mrs. Clavering came up to dress, and then Fanny, following her quickly into her bedroom, abruptly began:

"Mamma," she said, "I want to speak to you very much."

"Well, my dear?"

"But you mustn't be in a hurry, mamma." Mrs. Clavering looked at her watch, and declaring that it still wanted three-quarters of an hour to dinner, promised that she would not be very much in a hurry.

"Mamma, Mr. Saul has been speaking to me again."

"Has he, my dear? You cannot, of course, help it if he chooses to speak to you, but he ought to know that it is very foolish. It must end in his having to leave us."

"That is what he says, mamma. He says he must go away unless —"

"Unless what?"

"Unless I will consent that he shall remain here as —"

"As your accepted lover. Is that it, Fanny?"

"Yes, mamma."

"Then he must go, I suppose. What else can any of us say? I shall be sorry both for his sake and for your papa's." Mrs. Clavering, as she said this, looked at her daughter, and saw at once that this edict on her part did not settle the difficulty. There was that in Fanny's face which showed trouble and the necessity of further explanation. "Is not that what you think yourself my dear?" Mrs. Clavering asked.

"I should be very sorry if he had to leave the parish on my account."

"We all shall feel that, dearest; but what can we do? I presume you don't wish him to remain as your lover?"

"I don't know, mamma," said Fanny.

It was then as Mrs. Clavering had feared. Indeed, from the first word that Fanny had spoken on the present occasion, she had almost been

sure of the facts, as they now were. To her father it would appear wonderful that his daughter should have come to love such a man as Mr. Saul, but Mrs. Clavering knew better than he how far perseverance will go with women — perseverance joined with high mental capacity, and with high spirit to back it. She was grieved but not surprised, and would at once have accepted the idea of Mr. Saul becoming her son-in-law, had not the poverty of the man been so much against him. "Do you mean, my dear, that you wish him to remain here after what he has said to you? That would be tantamount to accepting him. You understand that, Fanny; eh, dear?"

"I suppose it would, mamma."

"And is that what you mean? Come, dearest, tell me the whole of it. What have you said to him yourself? What has he been led to think from the answer you have given him today?"

"He says that he means to see papa tomorrow."

"But is he to see him with your consent?" Fanny had hitherto placed herself in the nook of a bow-window which looked out into the garden, and there, though she was near to the dressing-table at which her mother was sitting, she could so far screen herself as almost to hide her face when she was speaking. From this retreat her mother found it necessary to withdraw her; so she rose, and going to a sofa in the room, bade her daughter come and sit beside her. "A doctor, my dear, can never do any good," she said, "unless the patient will tell him everything. Have you told Mr. Saul that he may see papa — as coming from you, you know?"

"No, mamma; I did not tell him that. I told him that it would be altogether impossible, because we should be so poor."

"He ought to have known that himself."

"But I don't think he ever thinks of such things as that, mamma. I can't tell you quite what he said, but it went to show that he didn't regard money at all."

"But that is nonsense; is it not, Fanny?"

"What he means is, not that people if they are fond of each other ought to marry at once when they have got nothing to live upon, but that they ought to tell each other so, and then be content to wait. I suppose he thinks that some day he may have a living."

"But, Fanny, are you fond of him; and have you ever told him so?"

"I have never told him so, mamma."

"But you are fond of him?" To this question Fanny made no answer, and now Mrs. Clavering knew it all. She felt no inclination to scold her daughter, or even to point out in very strong language how foolish Fanny had been in allowing a man to engage her affections merely by asking for them. The thing was a misfortune, and should have been

avoided by the departure of Mr. Saul from the parish after his first declaration of love. He had been allowed to remain for the sake of the rector's comfort, and the best must now be made of it. That Mr. Saul must now go was certain, and Fanny must endure the weariness of an attachment with an absent lover to which her father would not consent. It was very bad, but Mrs. Clavering did not think that she could make it better by attempting to scold her daughter into renouncing the man.

"I suppose you would like me to tell papa all this before Mr. Saul comes tomorrow?"

"If you think it best, mamma."

"And you mean, dear, that you would wish to accept him, only that he has no income?"

"I think so, mamma."

"Have you told him so?"

"I did not tell him so, but he understands it."

"If you did not tell him so, you might still think of it again."

But Fanny had surrendered herself now, and was determined to make no further attempt at sending the garrison up to the wall. "I am sure, mamma, that if he were well off like Edward, I should accept him. It is only because he has no income."

"But you have not told him that?"

"I would not tell him anything without your consent and papa's. He said he should go to papa tomorrow, and I could not prevent that. I did say that I knew it was quite impossible."

The mischief was done and there was no help for it. Mrs. Clavering told her daughter that she would talk it all over with the rector that night, so that Fanny was able to come down to dinner without fearing any further scene on that evening. But on the following morning she did not appear at prayers, nor was she present at the breakfast table. Her mother went to her early, and she immediately asked if it was considered necessary that she should see her father before Mr. Saul came. But this was not required of her.

"Papa says that it is out of the question," said Mrs. Clavering.

"I told him so myself" said Fanny, beginning to whimper.

"And there must be no engagements," said Mrs. Clavering.

"No, mamma. I haven't engaged myself. I told him it was impossible."

"And papa thinks that Mr. Saul must leave him," continued Mrs. Clavering.

"I knew papa would say that; but, mamma, I shall not forget him for that reason."

To this Mrs. Clavering made no reply, and Fanny was allowed to remain upstairs till Mr. Saul had come and gone.

Very soon after breakfast Mr. Saul did come. His presence at the rectory was so common that the servants were not generally summoned to announce his arrivals, but his visits were made to Mrs. Clavering and Fanny more often than to the rector. On this occasion he rang the bell, and asked for Mr. Clavering, and was shown into the rector's so-called study, in a way that the maid-servant felt to be unusual. And the rector was sitting uncomfortably prepared for the visit, not having had his after-breakfast cigar. He had been induced to declare that he was not, and would not be, angry with Fanny; but Mr. Saul was left to such indignation as he thought it incumbent on himself to express. In his opinion, the marriage was impossible, not only because there was no money, but because Mr. Saul was Mr. Saul, and because Fanny Clavering was Fanny Clavering. Mr. Saul was a gentleman; but that was all that could be said of him. There is a class of country clergymen in England, of whom Mr. Clavering was one, and his son-in-law, Mr. Fielding, another, which is so closely allied to the squirearchy as to possess a double identity. Such clergymen are not only clergymen, but they are country gentlemen also. Mr. Clavering regarded clergymen of his class — of the country gentlemen class — as being quite distinct from all others, and as being, I may say, very much higher than all others, without reference to any money question. When meeting his brother rectors and vicars, he had quite a different tone in addressing them, as they might belong to his class, or to another. There was no offence in this. The clerical country gentlemen understood it all as though there were some secret sign or shibboleth between them; but the outsiders had no complaint to make of arrogance, and did not feel themselves aggrieved. They hardly knew that there was an inner clerical familiarity to which they were not admitted. But now that there was a young curate from the outer circle demanding Mr. Clavering's daughter in marriage, and that without a shilling in his pocket, Mr. Clavering felt that the eyes of the offender must be opened. The nuisance to him was very great, but this opening of Mr. Saul's eyes was a duty from which he could not shrink.

He got up when the curate entered, and greeted his curate, as though he were unaware of the purpose of the present visit. The whole burden of the story was to be thrown upon Mr. Saul. But that gentleman was not long in casting the burden from his shoulders.

"Mr. Clavering," he said, "I have come to ask your permission to be a suitor for your daughter's hand."

The rector was almost taken aback by the abruptness of the request. "Quite impossible, Mr. Saul," he said; "quite impossible. I am told by Mrs. Clavering that you were speaking to Fanny again about this

yesterday, and I must say that I think you have been behaving very badly."

"In what way have I behaved badly?"

"In endeavoring to gain her affections behind my back."

"But, Mr. Clavering, how otherwise could I gain them? How otherwise does any man gain any woman's love? If you mean —"

"Look here, Mr. Saul. I don't think that there is any necessity for an argument between you and me on this point. That you cannot marry Miss Clavering is so self-evident that it does not require to be discussed. If there were nothing else against it, neither of you have got a penny. I have not seen my daughter since I heard of this madness — hear me out if you please, sir — since I heard of this madness, but her mother tells me that she is quite aware of that fact. Your coming to me with such a proposition is an absurdity if it is nothing worse. Now you must do one of two things, Mr. Saul. You must either promise me that this shall be at an end altogether, or you must leave the parish."

"I certainly shall not promise you that my hopes as they regard your daughter will be at an end."

"Then, Mr. Saul, the sooner you go the better."

A dark cloud came across Mr. Saul's brow as he heard these last words. "That is the way in which you would send away your groom, if he had offended you," he said.

"I do not wish to be unnecessarily harsh," said Mr. Clavering, "and what I say to you now I say to you not as my curate, but as to a most unwarranted suitor for my daughter's hand. Of course I cannot turn you out of the parish at a day's notice. I know that well enough. But your feelings as a gentleman ought to make you aware that you should go at once."

"And that is to be my only answer?"

"What answer did you expect?"

"I have been thinking so much lately of the answers I might get from your daughter, that I have not made other calculations. Perhaps I had no right to expect any other than that you have now given."

"Of course you had not. And now I ask you again to give her up."

"I shall not do that, certainly."

"Then, Mr. Saul, you must go; and, inconvenient as it will be to myself — terribly inconvenient — I must ask you to go at once. Of course I cannot allow you to meet my daughter anymore. As long as you remain she will be debarred from going to her school, and you will be debarred from coming here."

"If I say that I will not seek her at the school?"

"I will not have it. It is out of the question that you should remain in the parish. You ought to feel it."

"Mr. Clavering, my going — I mean my instant going — is a matter of which I have not yet thought. I must consider it before I give you an answer."

"It ought to require no consideration," said Mr. Clavering, rising from his chair — "none at all; not a moment's. Heavens and earth! Why, what did you suppose you were to live upon? But I won't discuss it. I will not say one more word upon a subject which is so distasteful to me. You must excuse me if I leave you."

Mr. Saul then departed, and from this interview had arisen that state of things in the parish which had induced Mrs. Clavering to call Harry to their assistance. The rector had become more energetic on the subject than any of them had expected. He did not actually forbid his wife to see Mr. Saul, but he did say that Mr. Saul should not come to the rectory. Then there arose a question as to the Sunday services, and yet Mr. Clavering would have no intercourse with his curate. He would have no intercourse with him unless he would fix an immediate day for going, or else promise that he would think no more of Fanny. Hitherto he had done neither, and therefore Mrs. Clavering had sent for her son.

Chapter XL

Mr. Saul's Abode

When Harry Clavering left London he was not well, though he did not care to tell himself that he was ill. But he had been so harassed by his position, was so ashamed of himself and as yet so unable to see any escape from his misery, that he was sore with fatigue and almost worn out with trouble. On his arrival at the parsonage, his mother at once asked him if he was ill, and received his petulant denial with an ill-satisfied countenance. That there was something wrong between him

and Florence she suspected, but at the present moment she was not disposed to inquire into that matter. Harry's love affairs had for her a great interest, but Fanny's love affairs at the present moment were paramount in her bosom. Fanny, indeed, had become very troublesome since Mr. Saul's visit to her father. On the evening of her conversation with her mother, and on the following morning, Fanny had carried herself with bravery, and Mrs. Clavering had been disposed to think that her daughter's heart was not wounded deeply. She had admitted the impossibility of her marriage with Mr. Saul, and had never insisted on the strength of her attachment. But no sooner was she told that Mr. Saul had been banished from the house, than she took upon herself to mope in the most lovelorn fashion, and behaved herself as though she were the victim of an all-absorbing passion. Between her and her father no word on the subject had been spoken, and even to her mother she was silent, respectful and subdued, as it becomes daughters to be who are hardly used when they are in love. Now, Mrs. Clavering felt that in this her daughter was not treating her well.

"But you don't mean to say that she cares for him?" Harry said to his mother, when they were alone on the evening of his arrival.

"Yes, she cares for him, certainly. As far as I can tell, she cares for him very much."

"It is the oddest thing I ever knew in my life. I should have said he was the last man in the world for success of that kind."

"One never can tell, Harry. You see he is a very good young man."

"But girls don't fall in love with men because they're good, mother."

"I hope they do — for that and other things together."

"But he has got none of the other things. What a pity it was that he was let to stay here after he first made a fool of himself."

"It's too late to think of that now, Harry. Of course she can't marry him. They would have nothing to live on. I should say that he has no prospect of a living."

"I can't conceive how a man can do such a wicked thing," said Harry, moralizing, and forgetting for a moment his own sins. "Coming into a house like this, and in such a position, and then undermining a girl's affections, when he must know that it is quite out of the question that he should marry her! I call it downright wicked. It is treachery of the worst sort, and coming from a clergyman is, of course, the more to be condemned. I shan't be slow to tell him my mind."

"You will gain nothing by quarreling with him."

"But how can I help it, if I am to see him at all?"

"I mean that I would not be rough with him. The great thing is to make him feel that he should go away as soon as possible, and renounce

all idea of seeing Fanny again. You see, your father will have no conversation with him at all, and it is so disagreeable about the services. They'll have to meet in the vestry-room on Sunday, and they won't speak. Will not that be terrible? Anything will be better than that he should remain here."

"And, what will my father do for a curate?"

"He can't do anything till he knows when Mr. Saul will go. He talks of taking all the services himself."

"He couldn't do it, mother. He must not think of it. However, I'll see Saul the first thing tomorrow."

The next day was Tuesday, and Harry proposed to leave the rectory at ten o'clock for Mr. Saul's lodgings. Before he did so, he had a few words with his father who professed even deeper animosity against Mr. Saul than his son. "After that," he said, "I'll believe that a girl may fall in love with any man! People say all manner of things about the folly of girls; but nothing but this — nothing short of this — would have convinced me that it was possible that Fanny should have been such a fool. An ape of a fellow — not made like a man — with a thin hatchet face, and unwholesome stubbly chin. Good heavens!"

"He has talked her into it."

"But he is such an ass. As far as I know him, he can't say Bo! to a goose."

"There I think you are perhaps wrong."

"Upon my word I've never been able to get a word from him except about the parish. He is the most uncompanionable fellow. There's Edward Fielding is as active a clergyman as Saul; but Edward Fielding has something to say for himself."

"Saul is a cleverer man than Edward is; but his cleverness is of a different sort."

"It is of a sort that is very invisible to me. But what does all that matter? He hasn't got a shilling. When I was a curate, we didn't think of doing such things as that." Mr. Clavering had only been a curate for twelve months, and during that time had become engaged to his present wife with the consent of everyone concerned. "But clergymen were gentlemen then. I don't know what the Church will come to; I don't indeed."

After this Harry went away upon his mission. What a farce it was that he should be engaged to make straight the affairs of other people, when his own affairs were so very crooked! As he walked up to the old farmhouse in which Mr. Saul was living, he thought of this, and acknowledged to himself that he could hardly make himself in earnest about his sister's affairs, because of his own troubles. He tried to fill

himself with a proper feeling of dignified wrath and high paternal indignation against the poor curate; but under it all, and at the back of it all, and in front of it all, there was ever present to him his own position. Did he wish to escape from Lady Ongar; and if so, how was he to do it? And if he did not escape from Lady Ongar, how was he ever to hold up his head again?

He had sent a note to Mr. Saul on the previous evening giving notice of his intended visit, and had received an answer, in which the curate had promised that he would be at home. He had never been in Mr. Saul's room, and as he entered it, felt more strongly than ever how incongruous was the idea of Mr. Saul as a suitor to his sister. The Claverings had always had things comfortable around them. They were a people who had ever lived on Brussels carpets, and had seated themselves in capacious chairs. Ormolu, damask hangings, and Sevres china were not familiar to them; but they had never lacked anything that is needed for the comfort of the first-class clerical world. Mr. Saul in his abode boasted but few comforts. He inhabited a big bedroom, in which there was a vast fireplace and a very small grate — the grate being very much more modern than the fireplace. There was a small rag of a carpet near the hearth, and on this stood a large deal table — a table made of unalloyed deal, without any mendacious paint, putting forward a pretence in the direction of mahogany. One wooden Windsor armchair — very comfortable in its way — was appropriated to the use of Mr. Saul himself; and two other small wooden chairs flanked the other side of the fireplace. In one distant corner stood Mr. Saul's small bed, and in another distant corner stood his small dressing-table. Against the wall stood a rickety deal press in which he kept his clothes. Other furniture there was none. One of the large windows facing toward the farmyard had been permanently closed, and in the wide embrasure was placed a portion of Mr. Saul's library — books which he had brought with him from college; and on the ground under this closed window were arranged the others, making a long row, which stretched from the bed to the dressing-table, very pervious, I fear, to the attacks of mice. The big table near the fireplace was covered with books and papers — and, alas, with dust; for he had fallen into that terrible habit which prevails among bachelors, of allowing his work to remain ever open, never finished, always confused — with papers above books, and books above papers — looking as though no useful product could ever be made to come forth from such chaotic elements. But there Mr. Saul composed his sermons, and studied his Bible, and followed up, no doubt, some special darling pursuit, which his ambition dictated. But there he did not eat his meals; that had been made impossible by the pile of papers and dust; and his

chop, therefore, or his broiled rasher, or bit of pig's fry was deposited for him on the little dressing-table, and there consumed.

Such was the solitary apartment of the gentleman who now aspired to the hand of Miss Clavering; and for this accommodation, including attendance, he paid the reasonable sum of £10 per annum. He then had £60 left, with which to feed himself; clothe himself like a gentleman — a duty somewhat neglected — and perform his charities!

Harry Clavering, as he looked around him, felt almost ashamed of his sister. The walls were whitewashed, and stained in many places; and the floor in the middle of the room seemed to be very rotten. What young man who has himself dwelt ever in comfort would like such a house for his sister? Mr. Saul, however, came forward with no marks of visible shame on his face, and greeted his visitor frankly with an open hand. "You came down from London yesterday, I suppose?" said Mr. Saul.

"Just so," said Harry.

"Take a seat;" and Mr. Saul suggested the armchair, but Harry contented himself with one of the others. "I hope Mrs. Clavering is well?" "Quite well," said Harry, cheerfully. "And your father — and sister?" "Quite well, thank you," said Harry, very stiffly. "I would have come down to you at the rectory," said Mr. Saul, "instead of bringing you up here; only, as you have heard, no doubt, I and your father have unfortunately had a difference." This Mr. Saul said without any apparent effort, and then left Harry to commence the further conversation.

"Of course, you know what I'm come here about?" said Harry.

"Not exactly; at any rate not so clearly but what I would wish you to tell me."

"You have gone to my father as a suitor for my sister's hand."

"Yes, I have."

"Now you must know that that is altogether impossible — a thing not to be even talked of."

"So your father says. I need not tell you that I was very sorry to hear him speak in that way."

"But, my dear fellow, you can't really be in earnest? You can't suppose it possible that he would allow such an engagement?"

"As to the latter question, I have no answer to give; but I certainly was, and certainly am in earnest."

"Then I must say that I think you have a very erroneous idea of what the conduct of a gentleman should be."

"Stop a moment, Clavering," said Mr. Saul, rising, and standing with his back to the big fireplace. "Don't allow yourself to say in a hurry

words which you will afterward regret. I do not think you can have intended to come here and tell me that I am not a gentleman."

"I don't want to have an argument with you; but you must give it up; that's all."

"Give what up? If you mean give up your sister, I certainly shall never do that. She may give me up, and if you have anything to say on that head, you had better say it to her."

"What right can you have — without a shilling in the world — ?"

"I should have no right to marry her in such a condition — with your father's consent or without it. It is a thing which I have never proposed — to myself for a moment — or to her."

"And what have you proposed to yourself?"

Mr. Saul paused a moment before he spoke, looking down at the dusty heaps upon his table, as though hoping that inspiration might come to him from them. "I will tell you what I have proposed," said he at last, "as nearly as I can put it into words. I propose to myself to have the image in my heart of one human being whom I can love above all the world beside; I propose to hope that I, as others, may some day marry, and that she whom I so love may become my wife; I propose to bear with such courage as I can much certain delay, and probable absolute failure in all this; and I propose also to expect — no, hardly to expect — that that which I will do for her, she will do for me. Now you know all my mind, and you may be sure of this, that I will instigate your sister to no disobedience."

"Of course she will not see you again."

"I shall think that hard after what has passed between us; but I certainly shall not endeavor to see her clandestinely."

"And under these circumstances, Mr. Saul, of course you must leave us."

"So your father says."

"But leave us at once, I mean. It cannot be comfortable that you and my father should go on in the parish together in this way."

"What does your father mean by *at once*?"

"The sooner the better; say in two months' time at furthest."

"Very well. I will go in two months' time. I have no other home to go to, and no other means of livelihood; but as your father wishes it, I will go at the end of two months. As I comply with this, I hope my request to see your sister once before I go will not be refused."

"It could do no good, Mr. Saul."

"To me it would do great good, and, as I think, no harm to her."

"My father, I am sure, will not allow it. Indeed, why should he? Nor, as I understand, would my sister wish it."

"Has she said so?"

"Not to me; but she has acknowledged that any idea of a marriage between herself and you is quite impossible, and after that I'm sure she'll have too much sense to wish for an interview. If there is anything further that I can do for you, I shall be most happy." Mr. Saul did not see that Harry Clavering could do anything for him, and then Harry took his leave. The rector; when he heard of the arrangement, expressed himself as in some sort satisfied. One month would have been better than two, but then it could hardly be expected that Mr. Saul could take himself away instantly, without looking for a hole in which to lay his head. "Of course it is understood that he is not to see her?" the rector said. In answer to this, Harry explained what had taken place, expressing his opinion that Mr. Saul would, at any rate, keep his word. "Interview, indeed!" said the rector. "It is the man's audacity that most astonishes me. It passes me to think how such a fellow can dare to propose such a thing. 'What is it that he expects as the end of it?'" Then Harry endeavored to repeat what Mr. Saul had said as to his own expectations, but he was quite aware that he failed to make his father understand those expectations as he had understood them when the words came from Mr. Saul's own mouth. Harry Clavering had acknowledged to himself that it was impossible not to respect the poor curate.

To Mrs. Clavering, of course, fell the task of explaining to Fanny what had been done, and what was going to be done. "He is to go away, my dear, at the end of two months."

"Very well, mamma."

"And, of course, you and he are not to meet before that."

"Of course not, if you and papa say so."

"I have told your papa that it will only be necessary to tell you this, and that then you can go to your school just as usual, if you please. Neither papa nor I would doubt your word for a moment."

"But what can I do if he comes to me?" asked Fanny, almost whimpering.

"He has said that he will not, and we do not doubt his word either."

"That I am sure you need not. Whatever anybody may say, Mr. Saul is as much a gentleman as though he had the best living in the diocese. No one ever knew him break his word — not a hair's breadth — or do — anything else — that he ought — not to do." And Fanny, as she pronounced this rather strong eulogium, began to sob. Mrs. Clavering felt that Fanny was headstrong, and almost ill-natured, in speaking in this tone of her lover, after the manner in which she had been treated; but there could be no use in discussing Mr. Saul's virtues, and therefore she let the matter drop. "If you will take my advice," she said, "you will

go about your occupations just as usual. You'll soon recover your spirits in that way."

"I don't want to recover my spirits," said Fanny; "but if you wish it, I'll go on with the schools."

It was quite manifest now that Fanny intended to play the role of a broken-hearted young lady, and to regard the absent Mr. Saul with passionate devotion. That this should be so Mrs. Clavering felt to be the more cruel, because no such tendencies had been shown before the paternal sentence against Mr. Saul had been passed. Fanny, in telling her own tale, had begun by declaring that any such an engagement was an impossibility. She had not asked permission to have Mr. Saul for a lover. She had given no hint that she even hoped for such permission. But now when that was done which she herself had almost dictated, she took upon herself to live as though she were ill-used as badly as a heroine in a castle among the Apennines! And in this way she would really become deeply in love with Mr. Saul — thinking of all which Mrs. Clavering almost regretted that the edict of banishment had gone forth. It would, perhaps, have been better to have left Mr. Saul to go about the parish, and to have laughed Fanny out of her fancy. But it was too late now for that, and Mrs. Clavering said nothing further on the subject to anyone.

On the day following his visit to the farmhouse, Harry Clavering was unwell — too unwell to go back to London; and on the next day he was ill in bed. Then it was that he got his mother to write to Mrs. Burton; and then also he told his mother a part of his troubles. When the letter was written he was very anxious to see it, and was desirous that it should be specially worded, and so written as to make Mrs. Burton certain that he was in truth too ill to come to London, though not ill enough to create alarm. "Why not simply let me say that you are kept here for a day or two?" asked Mrs. Clavering.

"Because I promised that I would be in Onslow Terrace tomorrow, and she must not think that I would stay away if I could avoid it."

Then Mrs. Clavering closed the letter and directed it. When she had done that, and put on it the postage-stamp, she asked in a voice that was intended to be indifferent, whether Florence was in London; and, hearing that she was so, expressed her surprise that the letter should not be written to Florence.

"My engagement was with Mrs. Burton," said Harry.

"I hope there is nothing wrong between you and Florence?" said his mother. To this question Harry made no immediate answer, and Mrs. Clavering was afraid to press it. But after a while he returned to the

subject himself. "Mother," he said, "things are wrong between Florence and me."

"Oh, Harry; what has she done?"

"It is rather what have I done! As for her, she has simply trusted herself to a man who has been false to her."

"Dear Harry, do not say that. What is it that you mean? It is not true about Lady Ongar?"

"Then you have heard, mother. Of course I do not know what you have heard, but it can be hardly worse than the truth. But you must not blame her. Whatever fault there may be, is all mine." Then he told her much of what had occurred in Bolton Street. We may suppose that he said nothing of that mad caress — nothing, perhaps, of the final promise which he made to Julia as he last passed out of her presence; but he did give her to understand that he had in some way returned to his old passion for the woman whom he had first loved.

I should describe Mrs. Clavering in language too highly eulogistic were I to lead the reader to believe that she was altogether averse to such advantages as would accrue to her son from a marriage so brilliant as that which he might now make with the grandly dowered widow of the late earl. Mrs. Clavering by no means despised worldly goods; and she had, moreover, an idea that her highly gifted son was better adapted to the spending than to the making of money. It had come to be believed at the rectory that though Harry had worked very hard at college — as is the case with many highly born young gentlemen — and though he would, undoubtedly, continue to work hard if he were thrown among congenial occupations — such as politics and the like — nevertheless, he would never excel greatly in any drudgery that would be necessary for the making of money. There had been something to be proud of in this, but there had, of course, been more to regret. But now if Harry were to marry Lady Ongar, all trouble on that score would be over. But poor Florence! When Mrs. Clavering allowed herself to think of the matter, she knew that Florence's claims should be held as paramount. And when she thought further and thought seriously, she knew also that Harry's honor and Harry's happiness demanded that he should be true to the girl to whom his hand had been promised. And, then, was not Lady Ongar's name tainted? It might be that she had suffered cruel ill-usage in this. It might be that no such taint had been deserved. Mrs. Clavering could plead the injured woman's cause when speaking of it without any close reference to her own belongings; but it would have been very grievous to her, even had there been no Florence Burton in the case, that her son should make his fortune by marrying a woman as to whose character the world was in doubt.

She came to him late in the evening when his sister and father had just left him, and sitting with her hand upon his, spoke one word, which perhaps had more weight with Harry than any word that had yet been spoken. "Have you slept, dear?" she said.

"A little before my father came in."

"My darling," she said, "you will be true to Florence; will you not?" Then there was a pause. "My own Harry, tell me that you will be true when your truth is due."

"I will, mother," he said.

"My own boy; my darling boy; my own true gentleman!" Harry felt that he did not deserve the praise; but praise undeserved, though it may be satire in disguise, is often very useful.

Chapter XLI

Going To Norway

On the next day Harry was not better, but the doctor said that there was no cause for alarm. He was suffering from a low fever, and his sister had better be kept out of his room. He would not sleep, and was restless, and it might be some time before he could return to London.

Early in the day the rector came into his son's bedroom, and told him and his mother, who was there, the news which he had just heard from the great house. "Hugh has come home," he said, "and is going out yachting for the rest of the Summer. They are going to Norway in Jack Stuart's yacht. Archie is going with them." Now Archie was known to be a great man in a yacht, cognizant of ropes, well up in booms and spars, very intimate with bolts, and one to whose hands a tiller came as naturally as did the saddle of a steeple-chase horse to the legs of his friend Doodles. "They are going to fish," said the rector.

"But Jack Stuart's yacht is only a river boat — or just big enough for Cowes harbor, but nothing more," said Harry, roused in his bed to some excitement by the news.

"I know nothing about Jack Stuart or his boat either," said the rector; "but that's what they told me. He's down here, at any rate, for I saw the servant that came with him."

"What a shame it is," said Mrs. Clavering — "a scandalous shame."

"You mean his going away?" said the rector.

"Of course I do; his leaving her here by herself; all alone. He can have no heart; after losing her child and suffering as she has done. It makes me ashamed of my own name."

"You can't alter him, my dear. He has his good qualities and his bad — and the bad ones are by far the more conspicuous."

"I don't know any good qualities he has."

"He does not get into debt. He will not destroy the property. He will leave the family after him as well off as it was before him — and though he is a hard man, he does nothing actively cruel. Think of Lord Ongar, and then you'll remember that there are worse men than Hugh. Not that I like him. I am never comfortable for a moment in his presence. I always feel that he wants to quarrel with me, and that I almost want to quarrel with him."

"I detest him," said Harry, from beneath the bedclothes.

"You won't be troubled with him anymore this Summer, for he means to be off in less than a week."

"And what is she to do?" asked Mrs. Clavering.

"Live here as she has done ever since Julia married. I don't see that it will make much difference to her. He's never with her when he's in England, and I should think she must be more comfortable without him than with him."

"It's a great catch for Archie," said Harry.

"Archie Clavering is a fool," said Mrs. Clavering.

"They say he understands a yacht," said the rector, who then left the room.

The rector's news was all true. Sir Hugh Clavering had come down to the Park, and had announced his intention of going to Norway in Jack Stuart's yacht. Archie also had been invited to join the party. Sir Hugh intended to leave the Thames in about a week, and had not thought it necessary to give his wife any intimation of the fact, till he told her himself of his intention. He took, I think, a delight in being thus overharsh in his harshness to her. He proved to himself thus not only that he was master, but that he would be master without any let or drawback, without compunction, and even without excuses for his

ill-conduct. There should be no plea put in by him in his absences, that he had only gone to catch a few fish, when his intentions had been other than piscatorial. He intended to do as he liked now and always-and he intended that his wife should know that such was his intention. She was now childless, and, therefore, he had no other terms to keep with her than those which appertained to her necessities for bed and board. There was the house, and she might live in it; and there were the butchers and the bakers, and other tradesmen to supply her wants. Nay; there were the old carriage and the old horses at her disposal, if they could be of any service to her. Such were Sir Hugh Clavering's ideas as to the bonds inflicted upon him by his marriage vows.

"I'm going to Norway next week" It was thus Sir Hugh communicated his intention to his wife within five minutes of their first greeting.

"To Norway, Hugh?"

"Yes; why not to Norway? I and one or two others have got some fishing there. Archie is going, too. It will keep him from spending his money; or rather from spending money which isn't his."

"And for how long will you be gone?"

It was part of Sir Hugh Clavering's theory as to these matters that there should be no lying in the conduct of them. He would not condescend to screen any part of his doings by a falsehood — so he answered this question with exact truth.

"I don't suppose we shall be back before October."

"Not before October?"

"No. We are talking of putting in on the coast of Normandy somewhere; and probably may run down to Brittany. I shall be back, at any rate, for the hunting. As for the partridges, the game has gone so much to the devil here that they are not worth coming for."

"You'll be away four months?"

"I suppose I shall if I don't come back till October." Then he left her, calculating that she would have considered the matter before he returned, and have decided that no good could come to her from complaint. She knew his purpose now, and would no doubt reconcile herself to it quickly — perhaps with a few tears, which would not hurt him if he did not see them.

But this blow was almost more than Lady Clavering could bear — was more than she could bear in silence. Why she should have grudged her husband his trip abroad, seeing that his presence in England could hardly have been a solace to her, it is hard to understand. Had he remained in England, he would rarely have been at Clavering Park; and when he was at the Park he would rarely have given her the benefit of his society. When they were together, he was usually scolding her, or

else sitting in gloomy silence, as though that phase of his life was almost insupportable to him. He was so unusually disagreeable in his intercourse with her, that his absence, one would think, must be preferable to his presence. But women can bear anything better than desertion. Cruelty is bad, but neglect is worse than cruelty, and desertion worse even than neglect. To be treated as though she were not in existence, or as though her existence were a nuisance simply to be endured, and, as far as possible, to be forgotten, was more than even Lady Clavering could bear without complaint. When her husband left her, she sat meditating how she might turn against her oppressor. She was a woman not apt for fighting — unlike her sister, who knew well how to use the cudgels in her own behalf; she was timid, not gifted with a full flow of words, prone to sink and become dependent; but she — even she — with all these deficiencies-felt that she must make some stand against the outrage to which he was now to be subjected.

"Hugh," she said, when she next saw him, "you can't really mean that you are going to leave me from this time till the Winter?"

"I said nothing about the Winter."

"Well — till October?"

"I said that I was going, and I usually mean what I say."

"I cannot believe it, Hugh; I cannot bring myself to think that you will be so cruel."

"Look here, Hermy, if you take to calling names, I won't stand it."

"And I won't stand it, either. What am I to do? Am I to be here in this dreadful barrack of a house all alone? How would you like it? Would you bear it for one month, let alone four or five? I won't remain here; I tell you that fairly."

"Where do you want to go?"

"I don't want to go anywhere, but I'll go away somewhere and die; I will indeed. I'll destroy myself or something."

"Pshaw!"

"Yes; of course it's a joke to you. What have I done to deserve this? Have I ever done anything that you told me not? It's all because of Hughy — my darling — so it is; and it's cruel of you, and not like a husband; and it's not manly. It's very cruel. I didn't think anybody would have been so cruel as you are to me." Then she broke down and burst into tears.

"Have you done, Hermy?" said her husband.

"No; I've not done."

"Then go on again," said he.

But in truth she had done, and could only repeat her last accusation. "You're very, very cruel."

"You said that before."

"And I'll say it again. I'll tell everybody; so I will. I'll tell your uncle at the rectory, and he shall speak to you."

"Look here, Hermy, I can bear a deal of nonsense from you because some women are given to talk nonsense; but if I find you telling tales about me out of this house, and especially to my uncle, or indeed, to anybody I'll let you know what it is to be cruel."

"You can't be worse than you are."

"Don't try me; that's all. And as I suppose you have now said all that you've got to say, if you please we will regard that subject as finished." The poor woman had said all that she could say, and had no further means of carrying on the war. In her thoughts she could do so; in her thoughts she could wander forth out of the gloomy house in the night, and perish in the damp and cold, leaving a paper behind her to tell the world that her husband's cruelty had brought her to that pass. Or she would go to Julia and leave him forever. Julia, she thought, would still receive her. But as to one thing she had certainly made up her mind; she would go with her complaint to Mrs. Clavering at the rectory, let her lord and master show his anger in whatever form he might please.

The next day Sir Hugh himself made her a proposition which somewhat softened the aspect of affairs. This he did in his usual voice, with something of a smile on his face, and speaking as though he were altogether oblivious of the scenes of yesterday. "I was thinking, Hermy," he said, "that you might have Julia down here while I am away."

"Have Julia here?"

"Yes; why not? She'll come, I'm sure, when she knows that my back is turned."

"I've never thought about asking her — at least not lately."

"No; of course. But you might as well do so now. It seems that she never goes to Ongar Park, and, as far as I can learn, never will. I'm going to see her myself."

"You going to see her?"

"Yes; Lord Ongar's people want to know whether she can be induced to give up the place; that is, to sell her interest in it. I have promised to see her. Do you write her a letter first, and tell her that I want to see her; and ask her also to come here as soon as she can leave London."

"But wouldn't the lawyers: do it better than you?"

"Well; one would think so; but I am commissioned to make her a kind of apology from the whole Courton family. They fancy they've been hard upon her; and, by George, I believe they have. I may be able to say a word for myself too. If she isn't a fool she'll put her anger in her pocket, and come down to you."

Lady Clavering liked the idea of having her sister with her, but she was not quite meek enough to receive the permission now given her as full compensation for the injury done. She said that she would do as he had bidden her, and then went back to her own grievances. "I don't suppose Julia, even if she would come for a little time, would find it very pleasant to live in such a place as this, all alone."

"She wouldn't be all alone when you are with her," said Hugh, gruffly, and then again went out, leaving his wife to become used to her misfortune by degrees.

Chapter XLII

Parting

*I*t was not surprising that Lady Clavering should dislike her solitude at Clavering Park house, nor surprising that Sir Hugh should find the place disagreeable. The house was a large, square stone building, with none of the prettinesses of modern country-houses about it. The gardens were away from the house, and the cold, desolate, fiat park came up close around the windows: The rooms were very large and lofty — very excellent for the purpose of a large household, but with nothing of that snug, pretty comfort which solitude requires for its solace. The furniture was old and heavy, and the hangings were dark in color. Lady Clavering when alone there — and she generally was alone — never entered the rooms on the ground-floor. Nor did she ever pass through the wilderness of a hall by which the front door was to be reached. Throughout more than half her days she never came down stairs at all; but when she did so, preparatory to being dragged about the parish lanes in the old family carriage, she was let out at a small side-door; and so it came to pass that during the absences of the lord of the mansion, the shutters were not even moved from any of the lower windows. Under such circumstances there can be no wonder that Lady Clavering regarded the place as a prison. "I wish you could come upon it unawares, and see how gloomy

it is," she said to him. "I don't think you'd stand it alone for two days, let alone all your life."

"I'll shut it up altogether if you like," said he.

"And where am I to go?" she asked.

"You can go to Moor Hall if you please." Now Moor Hall was a small house, standing on a small property belonging to Sir Hugh, in that part of Devonshire which lies north of Dartmoor, somewhere near the Holsworthy region, and which is perhaps as ugly, as desolate, and as remote as any part of England. Lady Clavering had heard much of Moor Hall, and dreaded it as the heroine, made to live in the big grim castle low down among the Apennines, dreads the smaller and grimmer castle which is known to exist somewhere higher up in the mountains.

"Why couldn't I go to Brighton?" said Lady Clavering, boldly.

"Because I don't choose it," said Sir Hugh. After that she did go to the rectory, and told Mrs. Clavering all her troubles. She had written to her sister, having, however, delayed the doing of this for two or three days, and she had not at this time received an answer from Lady Ongar. Nor did she hear from her sister till after Sir Hugh had left her. It was on the day before his departure that she went to the rectory, finding herself driven to this act of rebellion by his threat of Moor Hall. "I will never go there unless I am dragged there by force," she said to Mrs. Clavering.

"I don't think he means that," said Mrs. Clavering. "He only wants to make you understand that you'd better remain at the Park."

"But if you knew what a house it is to be all alone in!"

"Dear Hermione, I do know! But you must come to us oftener, and let us endeavor to make it better for you."

"But how can I do that? How can I come to his uncle's house, just because my own husband has made my own home so wretched that I cannot bear it. I'm ashamed to do that. I ought not to be telling you all this, of course. I don't know what he'd do if he knew it; but it is so hard to bear it all without telling someone."

"My poor dear!"

"I sometimes think I'll ask Mr. Clavering to speak to him, and to tell him at once that I will not submit to it any longer. Of course he would be mad with rage, but if he were to kill me I should like it better than having to go on in this way. I'm sure he is only waiting for me to die."

Mrs. Clavering said all that she could to comfort the poor woman, but there was not much that she could say. She had strongly advocated the plan of having Lady Ongar at the Park, thinking perhaps that Harry would be more safe while that lady was at Clavering, than he might perhaps be if she remained in London. But Mrs. Clavering doubted

much whether Lady Ongar would consent to make such a visit. She regarded Lady Ongar as a hard, worldly, pleasure-seeking woman — sinned against perhaps in much, but also sinning in much herself — to whom the desolation of the Park would be even more unendurable than it was to the elder sister. But of this, of course, she said nothing. Lady Clavering left her, somewhat quieted, if not comforted; and went back to pass her last evening with her husband.

“Upon second thought, I’ll go by the first train,” he said, as he saw her for a moment before she went up to dress. “I shall have to be off from here a little after six, but I don’t mind that in Summer.” Thus she was to be deprived of such gratification as there might have been in breakfasting with him on the last morning! It might be hard to say in what that gratification would have consisted. She must by this time have learned that his presence gave her none of the pleasures usually expected from society. He slighted her in everything. He rarely vouchsafed to her those little attentions which all women expect from all gentlemen. If he handed her a plate, or cut for her a morsel of bread from the loaf, he showed by his manner, and by his brow, that the doing so was a nuisance to him. At their meals he rarely spoke to her — having always at breakfast a paper or a book before him, and at dinner devoting his attention to a dog at his feet. Why should she have felt herself cruelly ill-used in this matter of his last breakfast — so cruelly ill-used that she wept afresh over it as she dressed herself — seeing that she would lose so little? Because she loved the man; loved him, though she now thought that she hated him. We very rarely, I fancy, love those whose love we have not either possessed or expected — or at any rate for whose love we have not hoped; but when it has once existed, ill-usage will seldom destroy it. Angry as she was with the man, ready as she was to complain of him, to rebel against him — perhaps to separate herself from him forever, nevertheless she found it to be a cruel grievance that she should not sit at table with him on the morning of his going. “Jackson shall bring me a cup of coffee as I’m dressing,” he said, “and I’ll breakfast at the club.” She knew there was no reason for this, except that breakfasting at his club was more agreeable to him than breakfasting with his wife.

She had got rid of her tears before she came down to dinner, but still she was melancholy and almost lachrymose. This was the last night, and she felt that something special ought to be said; but she did not know what she expected, or what it was that she herself wished to say. I think that she was longing for an opportunity to forgive him — only that he would not be forgiven. If he would have spoken one soft word to her, she would have accepted that one word as an apology; but no such word came. He sat opposite to her at dinner, drinking his wine and feeding

his dog; but he was no more gracious to her at this dinner than he had been on any former day. She sat there pretending to eat, speaking a dull word now and then, to which his answer was a monosyllable, looking out at him from under her eyes, through the candlelight, to see whether any feeling was moving him; and then having pretended to eat a couple of strawberries she left him to himself. Still, however, this was not the last. There would come some moment for an embrace — for some cold, half-embrace, in which he would be forced to utter something of a farewell.

He, when he was left alone, first turned his mind to the subject of Jack Stuart and his yacht. He had on that day received a letter from a noble friend — a friend so noble that he was able to take liberties even with Sir Hugh Clavering — in which his noble friend had told him that he was a fool to trust himself on so long an expedition in Jack Stuart's little boat. Jack, the noble friend said, knew nothing of the matter, and as for the masters who were hired for the sailing of such crafts, their only object was to keep out as long as possible, with an eye to their wages and perquisites. It might be all very well for Jack Stuart, who had nothing in the world to lose but his life and his yacht; but his noble friend thought that any such venture on the part of Sir Hugh was simply tomfoolery. But Sir Hugh was an obstinate man, and none of the Claverings were easily made afraid by personal danger. Jack Stuart might know nothing about the management of a boat, but Archie did. And as for the smallness of the craft — he knew of a smaller craft which had been out on the Norway coast during the whole of the last season. So he drove that thought away from his mind, with no strong feelings of gratitude toward his noble friend.

And then for a few moments he thought of his own home. What had his wife done for him, that he should put himself out of his way to do much for her? She had brought him no money. She had added nothing, either by her wit, beauty, or rank, to his position in the world. She had given him no heir. What had he received from her that he should endure her commonplace conversation, and washed-out, dowdy prettinesses? Perhaps some momentary feeling of compassion, some twinge of conscience, came across his heart, as he thought of it all; but if so he checked it instantly, in accordance with the teachings of his whole life. He had made his reflections on all these things, and had tutored his mind to certain resolutions, and would not allow himself to be carried away by any womanly softness. She had her house, her carriage, her bed, her board, and her clothes; and seeing how very little she herself had contributed to the common fund, her husband determined that in having those things she had all that she had a right to claim. Then he

drank a glass of sherry, and went into the drawing room with that hard smile upon his face, which he was accustomed to wear when he intended to signify to his wife that she might as well make the best of existing things, and not cause unnecessary trouble, by giving herself airs or assuming that she was unhappy.

He had his cup of coffee, and she had her cup of tea, and she made one or two little attempts at saying something special — something that might lead to a word or two as to their parting; but she was careful and crafty, and she was awkward and timid — and she failed. He had hardly been there an hour, when looking at his watch he declared that it was ten o'clock, and that he would go to bed. Well; perhaps it might be best to bring it to an end, and to go through this embrace, and have done with it! Any tender word that was to be spoken on either side, it was now clear to her, must be spoken in that last farewell. There was a tear in her eye as she rose to kiss him; but the tear was not there of her own good will, and she strove to get rid of it without his seeing it. As he spoke he also rose, and having lit for himself a bed-candle, was ready to go.

"Good-bye, Hermy," he said, submitting himself, with the candle in his hand, to the inevitable embrace.

"Good-bye, Hugh; and God bless you," she said, putting her arms round his neck. "Pray — pray take care of yourself."

"All right," he said. His position with the candle was awkward, and he wished that it might be over.

But she had a word prepared which she was determined to utter, poor, weak creature that she was. She still had her arm round his shoulders, so that he could not escape without shaking her off; and her forehead was almost resting on his bosom. "Hugh," she said, "you must not be angry with me for what I said to you."

"Very well," said he; "I won't."

"And, Hugh," said she, "of course I can't like your going."

"Oh, yes, you will," said he.

"No; I can't like it; but, Hugh, I will not think ill of it anymore. Only be here as much as you can when you come home."

"All right," said he; then he kissed her forehead and escaped from her, and went his way, telling himself, as he went, that she was a fool.

That was the last he saw of her — before his yachting commenced; but she — poor fool — was up by times in the morning, and, peeping out between her curtains as the early summer sun glanced upon her eyelids, saw him come forth from the porch and descend the great steps, and get into his dog-cart and drive himself away. Then, when the sound of the gig could be no longer heard, and when her eyes could no longer

catch the last expiring speck of his hat, the poor fool took herself to bed again and cried herself to sleep.

Chapter XLIII

Captain Clavering Makes His Last Attempt

The yachting scheme was first proposed to Archie by his brother Hugh. "Jack says that he can make a berth for you, and you'd better come," said the elder brother, understanding that when his edict had thus gone forth, the thing was as good as arranged. "Jack finds the boat and men, and I find the grub and wine-and pay for the fishing," said Hugh; "so you need not make any bones about it." Archie was not disposed to make any bones about it as regarded his acceptance either of the berth or of the grub and wine, and as he would be expected to earn his passage by his work, there was no necessity for any scruple; but there arose the question whether he had not got more important fish to fry. He had not as yet made his proposal to Lady Ongar, and although he now knew that he had nothing to hope from the Russian Spy, nevertheless he thought that he might as well try his own hand at the venture. His resolution on this head was always stronger after dinner than before, and generally became stronger and more strong as the evening advanced; so that he usually went to bed with a firm determination "to pop," as he called it to his friend Doodles, early on the next day; but distance affected him as well as the hour of the day, and his purpose would become surprisingly cool in the neighborhood of Bolton Street. When, however, his brother suggested that he should be taken altogether away from the scene of action, he thought of the fine income and of Ongar Park with pangs of regret, and ventured upon a mild remonstrance. "But there's this affair of Julia, you know," said he.

"I thought that was all off," said Hugh.

"O dear, no; not off at all. I haven't asked her yet."

"I know you've not; and I don't suppose you ever will."

"Yes, I shall; that is to say, I mean it. I was advised not to be in too much of a hurry; that is to say, I thought it best to let her settle down a little after her first seeing me."

"To recover from her confusion?"

"Well, not exactly that. I don't suppose she was confused."

"I should say not. My idea is that you haven't a ghost of chance, and that as you haven't done anything all this time, you need not trouble yourself now."

"But I have done something," said Archie, thinking of his seventy pounds.

"You may as well give it up, for she means to marry Harry."

"No!"

"But I tell you she does. While you've been thinking he's been doing. From what I hear, he may have her tomorrow for the asking."

"But he's engaged to that girl whom they had with them down at the rectory," said Archie, in a tone which showed with what horror he should regard any inconstancy toward Florence Burton on the part of Harry Clavering.

"What does that matter? You don't suppose he'll let seven thousand a year slip through his fingers because he had promised to marry a little girl like her? If her people choose to proceed against him, they'll make him pay swinging damages; that is all."

Archie did not like this idea at all, and became more than ever intent on his own matrimonial prospects. He almost thought that he had a right to Lady Ongar's money, and he certainly did think that a monstrous injustice was done to him by this idea of a marriage between her and his cousin. "I mean to ask her as I've gone so far, certainly," said he.

"You can do as you like about that."

"Yes; of course I can do as I like; but when a fellow has gone in for a thing, he likes to see it through." He was still thinking of the seventy pounds which he had invested, and which he could now recover only out of Lady Ongar's pocket.

"And you mean to say that you won't come to Norway?"

"Well; if she accepts me —"

"If she accepts you," said Hugh, "of course you can't come; but supposing she don't?"

"In that case, I might as well do that as anything else," said Archie. Whereupon Sir Hugh signified to Jack Stuart that Archie would join the party, and went down to Clavering with no misgiving on that head.

Some few days after this there was another little dinner at the military club, to which no one was admitted but Archie and his friend Doodles.

Whenever these prandial consultations were held, Archie paid the bill. There were no spoken terms to that effect, but the regulation seemed to come naturally to both of them. Why should Doodles be taken from his billiards half-an-hour earlier than usual, and devote a portion of the calculating powers of his brain to Archie's service without compensation? And a richer vintage was needed when so much thought was required, the burden of which Archie would not of course allow to fall on his friend's shoulders. Were not this explained, the experienced reader would regard the devoted friendship of Doodles as exaggerated.

"I certainly shall ask her tomorrow," said Archie, looking with a thoughtful cast of countenance through the club window into the street. "It may be hurrying the matter a little, but I can't help that." He spoke in a somewhat boastful tone, as though he were proud of himself and had forgotten that he had said the same words once or twice before.

"Make her know that you're there; that's everything," said Doodles. "Since I fathomed that woman in Mount Street, I've felt that you must make the score off your own bat, if you're to make it at all."

"You did that well," said Archie, who knew that the amount of pleasing encouragement which he might hope to get from his friend, must depend on the praise which he himself should bestow. "Yes; you certainly did bowl her over uncommon well."

"That kind of thing just comes within my line," said Doodles, with conscious pride. "Now, as to asking Lady Ongar downright to marry me — upon my word I believe I should be half afraid of doing it myself."

"I've none of that kind of feeling," said Archie.

"It comes more in your way, I daresay," said Doodles. "But for me, what I like is a little bit of management — what I call a touch of the diplomatic. You'll be able to see her tomorrow?"

"I hope so. I shall go early — that is, as soon as I've looked through the papers and written a few letters. Yes, I think she'll see me. And as for what Hugh says about Harry Clavering, why, d—— it, you know, a fellow can't go on in that way; can he?"

"Because of the other girl, you mean?"

"He has had her down among all our people, just as though they were going to be married tomorrow. If a man is to do that kind of thing, what woman can be safe?"

"I wonder whether she likes him?" asked the crafty Doodles.

"She did like him, I fancy, in her calf days; but that means nothing. She knows what she's at now, bless you, and she'll look to the future. It's my son who'll have the Clavering property and be the baronet, not his. You see what a string to my bow that is."

When this banquet was over, Doodles made something of a resolution that it should be the last to be eaten on that subject. The matter had lost its novelty, and the price paid to him was not sufficient to secure his attention any longer. "I shall be here tomorrow at four," he said, as he rose from his chair with the view of retreating to the smoking-room, "and then we shall know all about it."

"Whichever way it's to be, it isn't worth your while keeping such a thing as that in hand any longer. I should say give her her chance tomorrow, and then have done with it." Archie in reply to this declared that those were exactly his sentiments, and then went away to prepare himself in silence and solitude for the next day's work.

On the following day at two o'clock Lady Ongar was sitting alone in the front room on the ground-floor in Bolton Street. Of Harry Clavering's illness she had as yet heard nothing, nor of his absence from London. She had not seen him since he had parted from her on that evening when he had asked her to be his wife, and the last words she had heard from his lips had made this request. She, indeed, had then bade him be true to her rival — to Florence Burton. She had told him this in spite of her love — of her love for him and of his for her. They two, she had said, could not now become man and wife; but he had not acknowledged the truth of what she had said. She could not write to him. She could make no overtures. She could ask no questions. She had no friend in whom she could place confidence. She could only wait for him, till he should come to tier or send to her, and let her know what was to be her fate.

As she now sat she held a letter in her hand which had just been brought to her from Sophie — from her poor, famished, but indefatigable Sophie. Sophie she had not seen since they had parted on the railway platform, and then the parting was supposed to be made in lasting enmity. Desolate as she was, she had congratulated herself much on her escape from Sophie's friendship, and was driven by no qualms of her heart to long for a renewal of the old ties. But it was not so with the more affectionate Sophie; and Sophie therefore had written — as follows:

Mount Street — Friday Morning

DEAREST, DEAREST JULIE: —

My heart is so sad that I cannot keep my silence longer. What; can such friendship as ours has been be made to die all in a minute? Oh, no — not at least in my bosom, which is filled with love for my Julie. And my Julie will not turn from her friend, who has been so true to her — ah, at such moments too — oh, yes, at such moments! — just for an angry word, or a little indiscretion. What

was it after all about my brother? Bah! He is a fool; that is all. If you shall wish it, I will never speak to him again. What is my brother to me, compared to my Julie? My brother is nothing to me. I tell him we go to that accursed island — accursed island because my Julie has quarreled with me there — and he arranges himself to follow us. What could I do? I could not tie him up by the leg in his London club. He is a man whom no one can tie up by the leg. *Mon Dieu*, no. He is very hard to tie up.

Do I wish him for your husband? Never! Why should I wish him for your husband? If I was a man, my Julie, I should wish you for myself. But I am not, and why should you not have him whom you like the best? If I was you, with your beauty and money and youth, I would have any man that I liked — everything. I know, of course — for did I not see? It is that young Clavering to whom your little heart wishes to render itself — not the captain who is a fool — such a fool! but the other who is not a fool, but a fine fellow — and so handsome! Yes; there is no doubt as to that. He is beautiful as a *Phoebus*. [This was good-natured on the part of Sophie, who, as the reader may remember, hated Harry Clavering herself.]

Well — why should he not be your own? As for your poor Sophie, she would do all in her power to assist the friend whom she love. There is that little girl — yes; it is true as I told you. But little girls cannot have all they want always. He is a gay deceiver. These men who are so beautiful as *Phoebus* are always deceivers. But you need not be the one deceived — you with your money and your beauty and your — what you call rank. No, I think not; and I think that little girl must put up with it, as other little girls have done, since the men first learned how to tell lies. That is my advice, and if you will let me I can give you good assistance.

Dearest Julie, think of all this, and do not banish your Sophie. I am so true to you, that I cannot live without you. Send me back one word of permission, and I will come to you, and kneel at your feet. And in the meantime, I am your most devoted friend,

SOPHIE

Lady Ongar, on the receipt of this letter, was not at all changed in her purpose with reference to Madam Gordeloup. She knew well enough where her Sophie's heart was placed, and would yield to no further pressure from that quarter; but Sophie's reasoning, nevertheless, had its effect. She, Lady Ongar, with her youth, her beauty, her wealth, and her rank, why should she not have that one thing which alone could make her happy, seeing, as she did see, or as she thought she saw, that in making herself happy she could do so much, could confer such great

blessings on him she loved? She had already found that the money she had received as the price of herself had done very little toward making her happy in her present state. What good was it to her that she had a carriage and horses and two footmen six feet high? One pleasant word from lips that she could love — from the lips of man or woman that she could esteem — would be worth it all. She had gone down to her pleasant place in the country — a place so pleasant that it had a fame of its own among the luxuriantly pleasant seats of the English country gentry; she had gone there, expecting to be happy in the mere feeling that it was all her own; and the whole thing had been to her so unutterably sad, so wretched in the severity of its desolation, that she had been unable to endure her life amid the shade of her own trees. All her apples hitherto had turned to ashes between her teeth, because her fate had forced her to attempt the eating of them alone. But if she could give the fruit to him — if she could make the apples over, so that they should all be his, and not hers, then would there not come to her some of the sweetness of the juice of them?

She declared to herself that she would not tempt this man to be untrue to his troth, were it not that in doing so she would so greatly benefit himself. Was it not manifest that Harry Clavering was a gentleman, qualified to shine among men of rank and fashion, but not qualified to make his way by his own diligence? In saying this of him, she did not know how heavy was the accusation that she brought against him; but what woman, within her own breast, accuses the man she loves? Were he to marry Florence Burton, would he not ruin himself and probably ruin her also? But she could give him all that he wanted. Though Ongar Park to her alone was, with its rich pastures, and spreading oaks, and lowing cattle, desolate as the Dead Sea shore, for him — and for her with him — would it not be the very paradise suited to them? Would it not be the heaven in which such a Phoebus should shine amid the gyrations of his satellites? A Phoebus going about his own field in knickerbockers, and with attendant satellites, would possess a divinity which, as she thought, might make her happy. As she thought of all this, and asked herself these questions, there was an inner conscience which told her that she had no right to Harry's love or Harry's hand; but still she could not cease to long that good things might come to her, though those good things had not been deserved. Alas, good things not deserved too often lose their goodness when they come! As she was sitting with Sophie's letter in her hand, the door was opened and Captain Clavering was announced.

Captain Archibald Clavering was again dressed in his very best, but he did not even yet show by his demeanor that aptitude for the business

now in hand, of which he had boasted on the previous evening to his friend. Lady Ongar, I think, partly guessed the object of his visit. She had perceived, or perhaps had unconsciously felt, on the occasion of his former coming, that the visit had not been made simply from motives of civility. She had known Archie in old days, and was aware that the splendor of his vestments had a significance. Well, if anything of that kind was to be done, the sooner it was done the better.

"Julia," he said, as soon as he was seated, "I hope I have the pleasure of seeing you quite well?"

"Pretty well, I thank you," said she.

"You have been out of town, I think?" She told him that she had been in the Isle of Wight for a day or two, and then there was a short silence. "When I heard that you were gone," he said, "I feared that perhaps you were ill!"

"O dear, no; nothing of that sort."

"I am so glad," said Archie; and then he was silent again. He had, however, as he was aware, thrown a great deal of expression into his inquiries after her health, and he had, now to calculate how he could best use the standing-ground that he had made for himself.

"Have you seen my sister lately?" she asked.

"Your sister? no. She is always at Clavering. I think it doosed wrong of Hugh, the way he goes on, keeping her down there, while he is up here in London. It isn't at all my idea of what a husband ought to do."

"I suppose she likes it," said Lady Ongar.

"Oh, if she likes it, that's a different thing, of course," said Archie. Then there was another pause.

"Don't you find yourself rather lonely here sometimes?" he asked.

Lady Ongar felt that it would be better for all parties that it should be over, and that it would not be over soon unless she could help him. "Very lonely indeed," she said; "but then I suppose that it is the fate of widows to be lonely."

"I don't see that at all," said Archie, briskly; "— unless they are old and ugly, and that kind of thing. When a widow has become a widow after she has been married ever so many years, why then I suppose she looks to be left alone; and I suppose they like it."

"Indeed, I can't say. I don't like it."

"Then you would wish to change?"

"It is a very intricate subject, Captain Clavering, and one which I do not think I am quite disposed to discuss at present. After a year or two, perhaps I shall go into society again. Most widows do, I believe."

"But I was thinking of something else," said Archie, working himself up to the point with great energy, but still with many signs that he was ill at ease at his work. "I was, by Jove!"

"And of what were you thinking, Captain Clavering?"

"I was thinking — of course you know, Julia, that since poor little Hughy's death, I am the next in for the title?"

"Poor Hughy! I'm sure you are too generous to rejoice at that."

"Indeed I am. When two fellows offered me a dinner at the club on the score of my chances, I wouldn't have it. But there's the fact; isn't it?"

"There is no doubt of that, I believe."

"None on earth; and the most of it is entailed, too; not that Hugh would leave an acre away from the title. I'm as safe as wax as far as that is concerned. I don't suppose he ever borrowed a shilling or mortgaged an acre in his life."

"I should think he was a prudent man."

"We are both of us prudent. I will say that of myself; though I oughtn't to say it. And now, Julia — a few words are the best after all. Look here — if you'll take me just as I am, I'm blessed if I shan't be the happiest fellow in all London. I shall indeed. I've always been uncommon fond of you, though I never said anything about it in the old days, because — because you see, what's the use of a man asking a girl to marry him if they haven't got a farthing between them. I think it's wrong; I do, indeed; but it's different now, you know." It certainly was very different now.

"Captain Clavering," she said, "I'm sorry you should have troubled yourself with such an idea as this."

"Don't say that, Julia. It's no trouble; it's a pleasure."

"But such a thing as you mean never can take place."

"Yes, it can. Why can't it? I ain't in a hurry. I'll wait your own time, and do just whatever you wish all the while. Don't say no without thinking about it, Julia."

"It is one of those things, Captain Clavering, which want no more thinking than what a woman can give to it at the first moment."

"Ah — you think so now, because you're surprised a little."

"Well; I am surprised a little, as our previous intercourse was never of a nature to make such a proposition as this at all probable."

"That was merely because I didn't think it right," said Archie, who, now that he had worked himself into the vein, liked the sound of his own voice. "It was indeed."

"And I don't think it right now. You must listen to me for a moment, Captain Clavering — for fear of a mistake. Believe me, any such plan as

this is quite out of the question; quite." In uttering that last word she managed to use a tone of voice which did make an impression on him. "I never can, under any circumstances, become your wife. You might as well look upon that as altogether decided, because it will save us both annoyance."

"You needn't be so sure yet, Julia."

"Yes, I must be sure. And unless you will promise to drop the matter, I must — to protect myself — desire my servants not to admit you into the house again. I shall be sorry to do that, and I think you will save me from the necessity."

He did save her from that necessity, and before he went he gave her the required promise. "That's well," said she, tendering him her hand; "and now we shall part friends."

"I shall like to be friends," said he, in a crestfallen voice, and with that he took his leave. It was a great comfort to him that he had the scheme of Jack Stuart's yacht and the trip to Norway for his immediate consolation.

Chapter XLIV

What Lady Ongar Thought About It

Mrs. Burton, it may perhaps be remembered, had formed in her heart a scheme of her own — a scheme of which she thought with much trepidation, and in which she could not request her husband's assistance, knowing well that he would not only not assist it, but that he would altogether disapprove of it. But yet she could not put it aside from her thoughts, believing that it might be the means of bringing Harry Clavering and Florence together. Her husband had now thoroughly condemned poor Harry, and passed sentence against him; not, indeed, openly to Florence herself; but very often in the hearing of his wife. Cecilia, womanlike, was more angry with circumstances than with the offending man — with circumstances and with the woman who stood

in Florence's way. She was perfectly willing to forgive Harry, if Harry could only be made to go right at last. He was good-looking and pleasant, and had nice ways in a house, and was altogether too valuable as a lover to be lost without many struggles. So she kept to her scheme, and at last she carried it into execution.

She started alone from her house one morning, and, getting into an omnibus at Brompton, had herself put down on the rising ground in Piccadilly, opposite to the Green Park. Why she had hesitated to tell the omnibus-man to stop at Bolton Street can hardly be explained; but she had felt that there would be almost a declaration of guilt in naming that locality. So she got out on the little hill, and walked up in front of the prime minister's house — as it was then — and of the yellow palace built by one of our merchant princes, and turned into the street that was all but interdicted to her by her own conscience. She turned up Bolton Street, and with a trembling hand knocked at Lady Ongar's door.

Florence in the meanwhile was sitting alone in Onslow Terrace. She knew now that Harry was ill at Clavering — that he was indeed very ill, though Mrs. Clavering had assured her that his illness was not dangerous; for Mrs. Clavering had written to herself — addressing her with all the old familiarity and affection — with a warmth of affection that was almost more than natural. It was clear that Mrs. Clavering knew nothing of Harry's sins. Or, might it not be possible, Cecilia had suggested, that Mrs. Clavering might have known, and have resolved potentially that those sins should be banished, and become ground for some beautifully sincere repentance? Ah! how sweet it would be to receive that wicked sheep back again into the sheepfold, and then to dock him a little of his wandering powers, to fix him with some pleasant clog, to tie him down as a prudent domestic sheep should be tied, and make him the pride of the flock! But all this had been part of Cecilia's scheme, and of that scheme poor Florence knew nothing. According to Florence's view, Mrs. Clavering's letter was written under a mistake. Harry had kept his secret at home, and intended to keep it for the present. But there was the letter, and Florence felt that it was impossible for her to answer it without telling the whole truth. It was very painful to her to leave unanswered so kind a letter as that, and it was quite impossible that she should write of Harry in the old strain. "It will be best that I should tell her the whole," Florence had said, "and then I shall be saved the pain of any direct communication with him." Her brother, to whom Cecilia had repeated this, applauded his sister's resolution. "Let her face it and bear it, and live it down," he had said. "Let her do it at once, so that all this maudlin sentimentality may be at an end." But Cecilia would not accede to this, and as Florence was in truth resolved, and had

declared her purpose plainly, Cecilia was driven to the execution of her scheme more quickly than she had intended. In the meantime, Florence took out her little desk and wrote her letter. In tears, and an agony of spirit which none can understand but women who have been driven to do the same, was it written. Could she have allowed herself to express her thoughts with passion, it would have been comparatively easy; but it behooved her to be calm, to be very quiet in her words — almost reticent even in the language which she chose, and to abandon her claim not only without a reproach, but almost without an allusion to her love. While Cecilia was away, the letter was written, and re-written and copied; but Mrs. Burton was safe in this, that her sister-in-law had promised that the letter should not be sent till she had seen it.

Mrs. Burton, when she knocked at Lady Ongar's door, had a little note ready for the servant between her fingers. Her compliments to Lady Ongar, and would Lady Ongar oblige her by an interview. The note contained simply that, and nothing more; and when the servant took it from her, she declared her intention of waiting in the hall till she had received an answer. But she was shown into the dining room, and there she remained for a quarter of an hour, during which time she was by no means comfortable. Probably Lady Ongar might refuse to receive her; but should that not be the case — should she succeed in making her way into that lady's presence, how should she find the eloquence wherewith to plead her cause? At the end of the fifteen minutes, Lady Ongar herself opened the door and entered the room. "Mrs. Burton," she said, smiling, "I am really ashamed to have kept you so long; but open confession, they say, is good for the soul, and the truth is that I was not dressed." Then she led the way up stairs, and placed Mrs. Burton on a sofa, and placed herself in her own chair — from whence she could see well, but in which she could not be well seen — and stretched out the folds of her morning-dress gracefully, and made her visitor thoroughly understand that she was at home and at her ease.

We may, I think, surmise that Lady Ongar's open confession would do her soul but little good, as it lacked truth, which is the first requisite for all confessions. Lady Ongar had been sufficiently dressed to receive any visitor, but had felt that some special preparation was necessary for the reception of the one who had now come to her. She knew well who was Mrs. Burton, and surmised accurately the purpose for which Mrs. Burton had come. Upon the manner in which she now carried herself might hang the decision of the question which was so important to her — whether that Phoebus in knickerbockers should or should not become lord of Ongar Park? To effect success now, she must maintain an ascendancy during this coming interview, and in the maintenance of

all ascendancy, much depends on the outward man or woman; and she must think a little of the words she must use, and a little, too, of her own purpose. She was fully minded to get the better of Mrs. Burton if that might be possible, but she was not altogether decided on the other point. She wished that Harry Clavering might be her own. She would have wished to pension off that Florence Burton with half her wealth, had such pensioning been possible. But not the less did she entertain some half doubts whether it would not be well that she could abandon her own wishes, and give up her own hope of happiness. Of Mrs. Burton personally she had known nothing, and having expected to see a somewhat strong-featured and perhaps rather vulgar woman, and to hear a voice painfully indicative of a strong mind, she was agreeably surprised to find a pretty, mild lady, who from the first showed that she was half afraid of what she herself was doing. "I have heard your name, Mrs. Burton," said Lady Ongar, "from our mutual friend, Mr. Clavering, and I have no doubt you have heard mine from him also." This she said in accordance with the little plan which, during those fifteen minutes, she had laid down for her own guidance.

Mrs. Burton was surprised, and at first almost silenced, by this open mentioning of a name which she had felt that she would have the greatest difficulty in approaching. She said, however, that it was so. She had heard Lady Ongar's name from Mr. Clavering. "We are connected, you know," said Lady Ongar. "My sister is married to his first cousin, Sir Hugh; and when I was living with my sister at Clavering, he was at the rectory there. That was before my own marriage." She was perfectly easy in her manner, and flattered herself that the ascendancy was complete.

"I have heard so much from Mr. Clavering," said Cecilia.

"And he was very civil to me immediately on my return home. Perhaps you may have heard that also. He took this house for me, and made himself generally useful, as young men ought to do. I believe he is in the same office with your husband; is he not? I hope I may not have been the means of making him idle?"

This was all very well and very pretty, but Mrs. Burton was already beginning to feel that she was doing nothing toward the achievement of her purpose. "I suppose he has been idle," she said, "but I did not mean to trouble you about that." Upon hearing this, Lady Ongar smiled. This supposition that she had really intended to animadvert upon Harry Clavering's idleness was amusing to her as she remembered how little such idleness would signify if she could only have her way.

"Poor Harry!" she said. "I supposed his sins would be laid at my door. But my idea is, you know, that he will never do any good at such work as that."

"Perhaps not — that is, I really can't say. I don't think Mr. Burton has ever expressed any opinion; and if he had —"

"If he had, you wouldn't mention it."

"I don't suppose I should, Lady Ongar — not to a stranger."

"Harry Clavering and I are not strangers," said Lady Ongar, changing the tone of her voice altogether as she spoke.

"No, I know that. You have known him longer than we have. I am aware of that."

"Yes; before he ever dreamed of going into your husband's business, Mrs. Burton; long before he had ever been to — Stratton."

The name of Stratton was an assistance to Cecilia, and seemed to have been spoken with the view of enabling her to commence her work.

"Yes," she said, "but nevertheless he did go to Stratton. He went to Stratton, and there he became acquainted with my sister-in-law, Florence Burton."

"I am aware of it, Mrs. Burton."

"And he also became engaged to her."

"I am aware of that, too. He has told me as much himself."

"And has he told you whether he means to keep or to break that engagement?"

"Ah! Mrs. Burton, is that question fair? Is it fair either to him or to me? If he has taken me into his confidence and has not taken you, should I be doing well to betray him? Or if there can be anything in such a secret specially interesting to myself, why should I be made to tell it to you?"

"I think the truth is always the best, Lady Ongar."

"Truth is always better than a lie — so at least people say, though they sometimes act differently; but silence may be better than either."

"This is a matter, Lady Ongar, in which I cannot be silent. I hope you will not be vexed with me for coming to you, or for asking you these questions —"

"Oh dear, no."

"But I can not be silent. My sister-in-law must at any rate know what is to be her fate."

"Then why do you not ask him?"

"He is ill at present."

"Ill! Where is he ill? Who says he is ill?" And Lady Ongar, though she did not quite leave her chair, raised herself up and forgot all her preparations. "Where is he, Mrs. Burton? I have not heard of his illness."

"He is at Clavering — at the parsonage."

"I have heard nothing of this. What ails him? If he be really ill, dangerously ill, I conjure you to tell me. But pray tell me the truth. Let there be no tricks in such a matter as this."

"Tricks, Lady Ongar!"

"If Harry Clavering be ill, tell me what ails him. Is he in danger?"

"His mother, in writing to Florence, says that he is not in danger, but that he is confined to the house. He has been taken by some fever." On that very morning Lady Ongar had received a letter from her sister, begging her to come to Clavering Park during the absence of Sir Hugh, but in the letter no word had been said as to Harry's illness. Had he been seriously, or at least dangerously ill, Hermione would certainly have mentioned it. All this flashed across Julia's mind as these tidings about Harry reached her. If he were not really in danger, or even if he were, why should she betray her feeling before this woman? "If there had been much in it," she said, resuming her former position and manners, "I should no doubt have heard of it from my sister."

"We hear that it is not dangerous," continued Mrs. Burton; "but he is away, and we cannot see him. And, in truth, Lady Ongar, we can not see him anymore until we know that he means to deal honestly by us."

"Am I the keeper of his honesty?"

"From what I have heard, I think you are. If you will tell me that I have heard falsely, I will go away and beg your pardon for my intrusion. But if what I have heard be true, you must not be surprised that I show this anxiety for the happiness of my sister. If you knew her, Lady Ongar, you would know that she is too good to be thrown aside with indifference."

"Harry Clavering tells me that she is an angel — that she is perfect."

"And if he loves her, will it not be a shame that they should be parted?"

"I said nothing about his loving her. Men are not always fond of perfection. The angels may be too angelic for this world."

"He did love her."

"So I suppose — or, at any rate, he thought that he did."

"He did love her, and I believe he loves her still."

"He has my leave to do so, Mrs. Burton."

Cecilia, though she was somewhat afraid of the task which she had undertaken, and was partly awed by Lady Ongar's style of beauty and demeanor, nevertheless felt that if she still hoped to do any good, she must speak the truth out at once. She must ask Lady Ongar whether she held herself to be engaged to Harry Clavering. If she did not do this, nothing could come of the present interview.

"You say that, Lady Ongar, but do you mean it?" she asked. "We have been told that you also are engaged to marry Mr. Clavering."

"Who has told you so?"

"We have heard it. I have heard it, and have been obliged to tell my sister that I had done so."

"And who told you? Did you hear it from Harry Clavering himself?"

"I did. I heard it in part from him."

"Then why have you come beyond him to me? He must know. If he has told you that he is engaged to marry me, he must also have told you that he does not intend to marry Miss Florence Burton. It is not for me to defend him or to accuse him. Why do you come to me?"

"For mercy and forbearance," said Mrs. Burton, rising from her seat and coming over to the side of the room in which Lady Ongar was seated.

"And Miss Burton has sent you?"

"No; she does not know that I am here; nor does my husband know it. No one knows it. I have come to tell you that before God this man is engaged to become the husband of Florence Burton. She has learned to love him, and has now no other chance of happiness."

"But what of his happiness?"

"Yes, we are bound to think of that. Florence is bound to think of that above all things."

"And so am I. I love him too — as fondly, perhaps, as she can do. I loved him first, before she had even heard his name."

"But, Lady Ongar —"

"Yes, you may ask the question if you will, and I will answer it truly." They were both standing now and confronting each other. "Or I will answer it without your asking it. I was false to him. I would not marry him because he was poor, and then I married another because he was rich. All that is true. But it does not make me love him the less now. I have loved him through it all. Yes, you are shocked, but it is true; I have loved him through it all. And what am I to do now, if he still loves me? I can give him wealth now."

"Wealth will not make him happy."

"It has not made me happy, but it may help to do so with him. But with me, at any rate, there can be no doubt. It is his happiness to which I am bound to look. Mrs. Burton, if I thought that I could make him happy, and if he would come to me, I would marry him tomorrow, though I broke your sister's heart by doing so. But if I felt that she could do so more than I, I would leave him to her though I broke my own. I have spoken to you very openly. Will she say as much as that?"

"She would act in that way. I do not know what she would say."

"Then let her do so, and leave him to be the judge of his own happiness. Let her pledge herself that no reproaches shall come from her, and I will pledge myself equally. It was I who loved him first, and it is I who have brought him into this trouble. I owe him everything. Had I been true to him, he would never have thought of; never have seen Miss Florence Burton."

All that was no doubt true, but it did not touch the question of Florence's right. The fact on which Mrs. Burton wished to insist, if only she knew how, was this, that Florence had not sinned at all, and that Florence therefore ought not to bear any part of the punishment. It might be very true that Harry's fault was to be excused in part because of Lady Ongar's greater and primary fault, but why should Florence be the scapegoat?

"You should think of his honor as well as his happiness," said Mrs. Burton at last.

"That is rather severe, Mrs. Burton, considering that it is said to me in my own house. Am I so low as that, that his honor will be tarnished if I become his wife?" But she, in saying this, was thinking of things of which Mrs. Burton knew nothing.

"His honor will be tarnished," said she, "if he do not marry her whom he has promised to marry. He was welcomed by her father and mother to their house, and then he made himself master of her heart. But it was not his till he had asked for it, and had offered his own and his hand in return for it. Is he not bound to keep his promise? He can not be bound to you after any such fashion as that. If you are solicitous for his welfare, you should know that if he would live with the reputation of a gentleman, there is only one course open to him."

"It is the old story," said Lady Ongar; "the old story! Has not somebody said that the gods laugh at the perjuries of lovers? I do not know that men are inclined to be much more severe than the gods. These broken hearts are what women are doomed to bear."

"And that is to be your answer to me, Lady Ongar?"

"No, that is not my answer to you. That is the excuse I make for Harry Clavering. My answer to you has been very explicit. Pardon me if I say that it has been more explicit than you had any right to expect. I have told you that I am prepared to take any step that may be most conducive to the happiness of the man whom I once injured, but whom I have always loved. I will do this, let it cost myself what it may; and I will do this, let the cost to any other woman be what it may. You can not expect that I should love another woman better than myself." She said this, still standing, not without something more than vehemence in her tone. In her voice, in her manner and in her eye there was that

which amounted almost to ferocity. She was declaring that some sacrifice must be made, and that she reeked little whether it should be of herself or of another. As she would immolate herself without hesitation if the necessity should exist, so would she see Florence Burton destroyed without a twinge of remorse if the destruction of Florence would serve the purpose which she had in view. You and I, oh reader, may feel that the man for whom all this was to be done was not worth the passion. He had proved himself to be very far from such worth. But the passion, nevertheless, was there, and the woman was honest in what she was saying.

After this, Mrs. Burton got herself out of the room as soon as she found an opening which allowed her to go. In making her farewell speech, she muttered some indistinct apology for the visit which she had been bold enough to make. "Not at all," said Lady Ongar. "You have been quite right; you are fighting your battle for the friend you love bravely; and were it not that the cause of the battle must, I fear, separate us hereafter, I should be proud to know one who fights so well for her friends. And when this is all over and has been settled, in whatever way it may be settled, let Miss Burton know from me that I have been taught to hold her name and character in the highest possible esteem." Mrs. Burton made no attempt at further speech, but left the room with a low courtesy.

Till she found herself out in the street, she was unable to think whether she had done most harm or most good by her visit to Bolton Street; whether she had in any way served Florence, or whether she had simply confessed to Florence's rival the extent of her sister's misery. That Florence herself would feel the latter to be the case when she should know it all, Mrs. Burton was well aware. Her own ears had tingled with shame as Harry Clavinger had been discussed as a grand prize for which her sister was contending with another woman, and contending with so small a chance of success. It was terrible to her that any woman dear to her should seem to seek for a man's love. And the audacity with which Lady Ongar had proclaimed her own feelings had been terrible also to Cecilia. She was aware that she was meddling with things which were foreign to her nature, and which would be odious to her husband. But yet, was not the battle worth fighting? It was not to be endured that Florence should seek after this thing; but, after all, the possession of the thing in question was the only earthly good that could give any comfort to poor Florence. Even Cecilia, with all her partiality for Harry, felt that he was not worth the struggle; but it was for her now to estimate him at the price which Florence might put upon him — not at her own price.

But she must tell Florence what had been done, and tell her on that very day of her meeting with Lady Ongar. In no other way could she stop that letter which she knew that Florence would have already written to Mrs. Clavering. And could she now tell Florence that there was ground for hope? Was it not the fact that Lady Ongar had spoken the simple and plain truth when she had said that Harry must be allowed to choose the course which appeared to him to be the best for him? It was hard, very hard, that it should be so. And was it not true also that men, as well as gods, excuse the perjuries of lovers? She wanted to have back Harry among them as one to be forgiven easily, to be petted much, and to be loved always; but, in spite of the softness of her woman's nature, she wished that he might be punished sorely if he did not so return. It was grievous to her that he should any longer have a choice in the matter. Heavens and earth! was he to be allowed to treat a woman as he had treated Florence, and was nothing to come of it? In spite both of gods and men, the thing was so grievous to Cecilia Burton that she could not bring herself to acknowledge that it was possible. Such things had not been done in the world which she had known.

She walked the whole way home to Brompton, and had hardly perfected any plan when she reached her own door. If only Florence would allow her to write the letter to Mrs. Clavering, perhaps something might be done in that way. So she entered the house prepared to tell the story of her morning's work.

And she must tell it also to her husband in the evening! It had been hard to do the thing without his knowing of it beforehand, but it would be impossible to her to keep the thing a secret from him now that it was done.

Chapter XLV

How To Dispose of a Wife

When Sir Hugh came up to town there did not remain to him quite a week before the day on which he was to leave the coast of Essex in Jack Stuart's yacht for Norway, and he had a good deal to do in the meantime in the way of provisioning the boat. Fortnum and Mason, no doubt, would have done it all for him without any trouble on his part, but he was not a man to trust any Fortnum or any Mason as to the excellence of the article to be supplied, or as to the price. He desired to have good wine — very good wine, but he did not desire to pay a very high price. No one knew better than Sir Hugh that good wine can not be bought cheap; but things may be costly and yet not dear, or they may be both. To such matters Sir Hugh was wont to pay very close attention himself. He had done something in that line before he left London, and immediately on his return he went to the work again, summoning Archie to his assistance, but never asking Archie's opinion — as though Archie had been his head butler.

Immediately on his arrival in London he cross-questioned his brother as to his marriage prospects. "I suppose you are going with us?" Hugh said to Archie, as he caught him in the hall of the house in Berkeley Square on the morning after his arrival.

"Oh dear, yes," said Archie. "I thought that was quite understood. I have been getting my traps together." The getting of his traps together had consisted in the ordering of a sailor's jacket with brass buttons, and three pair of white duck trousers.

"All right," said Sir Hugh. "You had better come with me into the city this morning. I am going to Boxall's, in Great Thames Street."

"Are you going to breakfast here?" asked Archie.

"No; you can come to me at the Union in about an hour. I suppose you have never plucked up courage to ask Julia to marry you?"

"Yes I did," said Archie.

"And what answer did you get?" Archie had found himself obliged to repudiate with alacrity the attack upon his courage which his brother had so plainly made, but beyond that, the subject was one which was not pleasing to him. "Well, what did she say to you?" asked his brother, who had no idea of sparing Archie's feelings in such a matter.

"She said — indeed, I don't remember exactly what it was that she did say."

"But she refused you."

"Yes, she refused me. I think she wanted me to understand that I had come to her too soon after Ongar's decease."

"Then she must be an infernal hypocrite, that's all." But of any hypocrisy in this matter the reader will acquit Lady Ongar, and will understand that Archie had merely lessened the severity of his own fall by a clever excuse. After that the two brothers went to Boxall's in the city, and Archie, having been kept fagging all day, was sent in the evening to dine by himself at his own club.

Sir Hugh also was desirous of seeing Lady Ongar, and had caused his wife to say as much in that letter which she wrote to her sister. In this way an appointment had been made without any direct intercourse between Sir Hugh and his sister-in-law. They two had never met since the day on which Sir Hugh had given her away in Clavering Church. To Hugh Clavering, who was by no means a man of sentiment, this signified little or nothing. When Lady Ongar had returned a widow, and when evil stories against her had been rife, he had thought it expedient to have nothing to do with her. He did not himself care much about his sister-in-law's morals, but should his wife become much complicated with a sister damaged in character, there might come of it trouble and annoyance. Therefore he had resolved that Lady Ongar should be dropped. But during the last few months things had in some respects changed. The Courton people — that is to say, Lord Ongar's family — had given Hugh Clavering to understand that, having made inquiry, they were disposed to acquit Lady Ongar, and to declare their belief that she was subject to no censure. They did not wish themselves to know her, as no intimacy between them could now be pleasant, but they had felt it to be incumbent on them to say as much as that to Sir Hugh. Sir Hugh had not even told his wife, but he had twice suggested that Lady Ongar should be asked to Clavering Park. In answer to both these invitations, Lady Ongar had declined to go to Clavering Park.

And now Sir Hugh had a commission on his hands from the same Courton people, which made it necessary that he should see his sister-in-law, and Julia had agreed to receive him. To him, who was very hard in such matters, the idea of his visit was not made disagreeable by any

remembrance of his own harshness to the woman whom he was going to see. He cared nothing about that, and it had not occurred to him that she would care much. But, in truth, she did care very much, and when the hour was coming on which Sir Hugh was to appear, she thought much of the manner in which it would become her to receive him. He had condemned her in that matter as to which any condemnation is an insult to a woman, and he had so condemned her, being her brother-in-law and her only natural male friend. In her sorrow she should have been able to lean upon him; but from the first, without any inquiry, he had believed the worst of her, and had withdrawn from her altogether his support, when the slightest support from him would have been invaluable to her. Could she forgive this? Never! never! She was not a woman to wish to forgive such an offence. It was an offence which it would be despicable in her to forgive. Many had offended her, some had injured her, one or two had insulted her; but, to her thinking, no one had so offended her, had so injured her, had so grossly insulted her as he had done. In what way, then, would it become her to receive him?

Before his arrival she had made up her mind on this subject, and had resolved that she would, at least, say no word of her own wrongs.

"How do you do, Julia?" said Sir Hugh, walking into the room with a step which was perhaps unnaturally quick, and with his hand extended. Lady Ongar had thought of that, too. She would give much to escape the touch of his hand, if it were possible; but she had told herself that she would best consult her own dignity by declaring no actual quarrel. So she put out her fingers and just touched his palm.

"I hope Hermy is well?" she said.

"Pretty well, thank you. She is rather lonely since she lost her poor little boy, and would be very glad if you would go to her."

"I cannot do that, but if she would come to me I should be delighted."

"You see it would not suit her to be in London so soon after Hugh's death."

"I am not bound to London. I would go anywhere else — except to Clavering."

"You never go to Ongar Park, I am told."

"I have been there."

"But they say you do not intend to go again."

"Not at present, certainly. Indeed, I do not suppose I shall ever go there. I do not like the place."

"That's just what they have told me. It is about that — partly — that I want to speak to you. If you don't like the place, why shouldn't you

sell your interest in it back to the family? They'd give you more than the value for it."

"I do not know that I should care to sell it."

"Why not, if you don't mean to use the house? I might as well explain at once what it is that has been said to me. John Courton, you know, is acting as guardian for the young earl, and they don't want to keep up so large a place as the Castle. Ongar Park would just suit Mrs. Courton" — Mrs. Courton was the widowed mother of the young earl — "and they would be very happy to buy your interest."

"Would not such a proposition come best through a lawyer?" said Lady Ongar.

"The fact is this — they think they have been a little hard on you."

"I have never accused them."

"But they feel it themselves, and they think that you might perhaps take it amiss if they were to send you a simple message through an attorney. Courton told me that he would not have allowed any such proposition to be made, if you had seemed disposed to use the place. They wish to be civil, and all that kind of thing."

"Their civility or incivility is indifferent to me," said Julia.

"But why shouldn't you take the money?"

"The money is equally indifferent to me."

"You mean then to say that you won't listen to it? Of course they can't make you part with the place if you wish to keep it."

"Not more than they can make you sell Clavering Park. I do not, however, wish to be uncivil, and I will let you know through my lawyer what I think about it. All such matters are best managed by lawyers."

After that Sir Hugh said nothing, further about Ongar Park. He was well aware, from the tone in which Lady Ongar answered him, that she was averse to talk to him on that subject; but he was not conscious that his presence was otherwise disagreeable to her, or that she would resent any interference from him on any subject because he had been cruel to her. So, after a little while, he began again about Hermione. As the world had determined upon acquitting Lady Ongar, it would be convenient to him that the two sisters should be again intimate, especially as Julia was a rich woman. His wife did not like Clavering Park, and he certainly did not like Clavering Park himself. If he could once get the house shut up, he might manage to keep it shut for some years to come. His wife was now no more than a burden to him, and it would suit him well to put off the burden on to his sister-in-law's shoulders. It was not that he intended to have his wife altogether dependent on another person, but he thought that if they two were established together, in the first instance merely as a Summer arrangement, such establishment might be made

to assume some permanence. This would be very pleasant to him. Of course he would pay a portion of the expense — as small a portion as might be possible — but such a portion as might enable him to live with credit before the world.

"I wish I could think that you and Hermy might be together while I am absent," he said.

"I shall be very happy to have her, if she will come to me," Julia replied.

"What — here, in London? I am not quite sure that she wishes to come up to London at present."

"I have never understood that she had any objection to being in town," said Lady Ongar.

"Not formerly, certainly; but now, since her boy's death —"

"Why should his death make more difference to her than to you?" To this question Sir Hugh made no reply. "If you are thinking of society, she could be nowhere safer from any such necessity than with me. I never go out anywhere. I have never dined out, or even spent an evening in company, since Lord Ongar's death. And no one would come here to disturb her."

"I didn't mean that."

"I don't quite know what you did mean. From different causes, she and I are left pretty nearly equally without friends."

"Hermione is not left without friends," said Sir Hugh, with a tone of offence.

"Were she not, she would not want to come to me. Your society is in London, to which she does not come, or in other country houses than your own, to which she is not taken. She lives altogether at Clavering, and there is no one there except your uncle."

"Whatever neighborhood there is she has — just like other women."

"Just like some other women, no doubt. I shall remain in town for another month, and after that I shall go somewhere, I don't much care where. If Hermy will come to me as my guest, I shall be most happy to have her; and the longer she will stay with me the better. Your coming home need make no difference, I suppose."

There was a keenness of reproach in her tone as she spoke which even he could not but feel and acknowledge. He was very thick-skinned to such reproaches, and would have left this unnoticed had it been possible. Had she continued speaking he would have done so. But she remained silent, and sat looking at him, saying with her eyes the same thing that she had already spoken with her words. Thus he was driven to speak. "I don't know," said he, "whether you intend that for a sneer."

She was perfectly indifferent whether or no she offended him. Only that she had believed that the maintenance of her own dignity forbade it, she would have openly rebuked him, and told him that he was not welcome in her house. No treatment from her could, as she thought, be worse than he had deserved from her. His first enmity had injured her, but she could afford to laugh at his present anger. "It is hard to talk to you about Hermy without what you are pleased to call a sneer. You simply wish to rid yourself of her."

"I wish to do no such thing, and you have no right to say so."

"At any rate, you are ridding yourself of her society; and under those circumstances, she likes to come to me, I shall be glad to receive her. Our life together will not be very cheerful, but neither she nor I ought to expect a cheerful life."

He rose from his chair now with a cloud of anger upon his brow. "I can see how it is," said he; "because everything has not gone smooth with yourself; you choose to resent it upon me. I might have expected that you would not have forgotten in whose house you met Lord Ongar."

"No, Hugh, I forget nothing: neither when I met him, nor how I married him, nor any of the events that have happened since. My memory, unfortunately, is very good."

"I did all I could for you, and should have been safe from your insolence."

"You should have continued to stay away from me, and you would have been quite safe. But our quarreling in this way is foolish. We can never be friends, you and I, but we need not be open enemies. Your wife is my sister, and I say again that, if she likes to come to me, I shall be delighted to have her."

"My wife," said he, "will go to the house of no person who is insolent to me." Then he took his hat and left the room without further word or sign of greeting. In spite of his calculations and caution as to money — in spite of his well-considered arrangements and the comfortable provision for his future ease which he had proposed to himself; he was a man who had not his temper so much under control as to enable him to postpone his anger to his prudence. That little scheme for getting rid of his wife was now at an end. He would never permit her to go to her sister's house after the manner in which Julia had just treated him.

When he was gone, Lady Ongar walked about her own room smiling, and at first was well pleased with herself. She had received Archie's overture with decision, but at the same time with courtesy, for Archie was weak and poor and powerless. But she had treated Sir Hugh with scorn, and had been enabled to do so without the utterance of any actual reproach as to the wrongs which she herself had endured from him. He

had put himself in her power, and she had not thrown away the opportunity. She had told him that she did not want his friendship, and would not be his friend; but she had done this without any loud abuse unbecoming to her either as a countess, a widow, or a lady. For Hermione she was sorry. Hermione now could hardly come to her. But even as to that, she did not despair. As things were going on, it would become almost necessary that her sister and Sir Hugh should be parted. Both must wish it; and if this were arranged, then Hermione should come to her.

But from this she soon came to think again about Harry Clavering. How was that matter to be decided, and what steps would it become her to take as to its decision? Sir Hugh had proposed to her that she should sell her interest in Ongar Park, and she had promised that she would make known her decision on that matter through her lawyer. As she had been saying this, she was well aware that she would never sell the property; but she had already resolved that she would at once give it back, without purchase-money, to the Ongar family, were it not kept that she might hand it over to Harry Clavering as a fitting residence for his lordship. If he might be there, looking after his cattle, going about with the steward subservient at his heels, ministering justice to the Enoch Gubbys and others, she would care nothing for the wants of any of the Courton people. But if such were not to be the destiny of Ongar Park — if there were to be no such Adam in that Eden — then the mother of the little lord might take herself thither, and revel among the rich blessings of the place without delay, and with no difficulty as to price. As to price — had she not already found the money-bag that had come to her to be too heavy for her hands?

But she could do nothing till that question was settled; and how was she to settle it? Every word that had passed between her and Cecilia Burton had been turned over and over in her mind, and she could only declare to herself, as she had then declared to her visitor, that it must be as Harry should please. She would submit if he required her submission, but she could not bring herself to take steps to secure her own misery.

At last came the day on which the two Claverings were to go down to Harwich and put themselves on board Jack Stuart's yacht. The hail of the house in Berkeley Square was strewed with portmanteaus, gun cases, and fishing rods, whereas the wine and packets of preserved meat, and the bottled beer and fish in tins, and the large box of cigars, and the prepared soups, had been sent down by Boxall, and were by this time on board the boat. Hugh and Archie were to leave London this

day by train at 5 p.m., and were to sleep on board. Jack Stuart was already there, having assisted in working the yacht round from Brightlingsea.

On that morning Archie had a farewell breakfast at his club with Doodles, and after that, having spent the intervening hours in the billiard-room, a farewell luncheon. There had been something of melancholy in this last day between the friends, originating partly in the failure of Archie's hopes as to Lady Ongar, and partly, perhaps; in the bad character which seemed to cling to Jack Stuart and his craft. "He has been at it for years, and always coming to grief;" said Doodles. "He is just like a man I know, who has been hunting for the last ten years, and can't sit a horse at a fence yet. He has broken every bone in his side, and I don't suppose he ever saw a good thing to a finish. He never knows whether hounds are in cover, or where they are. His only idea is to follow another man's red coat till he comes to grief — and yet he will go on hunting. There are some people who never will understand what they can do and what they can't." In answer to this, Archie reminded his friend that on this occasion Jack Stuart would have the advantage of an excellent dry nurse, acknowledged to do very great on such occasions. Would not he, Archie Clavering, be there to pilot Jack Stuart and his boat? But, nevertheless, Doodles was melancholy, and went on telling stories about that unfortunate man who would continue to break his bones, though he had no aptitude for out-of-door sports. "He'll be carried home on a stretcher some day, you know," said Doodles.

"What does it matter if he is?" said Archie, boldly, thinking of himself and of the danger predicted for him. "A man can only die once."

"I call it quite a tempting of Providence," said Doodles.

But their conversation was chiefly about Lady Ongar and the Spy. It was only on this day that Doodles had learned that Archie had in truth offered his hand and been rejected, and Captain Clavering was surprised by the extent of his friend's sympathy. "It's a doosed disagreeable thing — a very disagreeable thing indeed," said Doodles. Archie, who did not wish to be regarded as specially unfortunate, declined to look at the matter in this light; but Doodles insisted. "It would cut me up like the very mischief," he said. "I know that; and the worst of it is, that perhaps you wouldn't have gone on, only for me. I meant it all for the best, old fellow! I did, indeed. There — that's the game to you. I'm playing uncommonly badly this morning; but the truth is, I'm thinking of those women." Now, as Doodles was playing for a little money, this was really civil on his part.

And he would persevere in talking about the Spy, as though there were something in his remembrance of the lady which attracted him irresistibly to the subject. He had always boasted that in his interview

with her he had come off with the victory, nor did he now cease to make such boasts; but still he spoke of her and her powers with an awe which would have completely opened the eyes of anyone a little more sharp on such matters than Archie Clavering. He was so intent on this subject that he sent the marker out of the room so that he might discuss it with more freedom, and might plainly express his views as to her influence on his friend's fate.

"By George! she's a wonderful woman. Do you know I can't help thinking of her at night? She keeps me awake—she does, upon my honor."

"I can't say she keeps me awake, but I wish I had my seventy pounds back again."

"Do you know, if I were you, I shouldn't grudge it? I should think it worth pretty nearly all the money to have had the dealing with her."

"Then you ought to go halves."

"Well, yes — only that I ain't flush, I would. When one thinks of it, her absolutely taking the notes out of your waistcoat pocket — upon my-word, it's beautiful! She'd have had it out of mine if I hadn't been doosed sharp."

"She understood what she was about, certainly."

"What I should like to know is this: did she or did she not tell Lady Ongar what she was to do — about you, I mean? I dare say she did, after all."

"And took my money for nothing."

"Because you didn't go high enough, you know."

"But that was your fault. I went as high as you told me."

"No you didn't, Clavvy, not if you remember. But the fact is, I don't suppose you could go high enough. I shouldn't be surprised if such a woman as that wanted — thousands! I shouldn't indeed. I shall never forget the way in which she swore at me and how she abused me about my family. I think she must have had some special reason for disliking Warwickshire, she said such awful hard things about it."

"How did she know that you came from Warwickshire?"

"She did know it. If I tell you something, don't you say anything about it. I have an idea about her."

"What is it?"

"I didn't mention it before, because I don't talk much of those sort of things. I don't pretend to understand them, and it is better to leave them alone."

"But what do you mean?"

Doodles looked very solemn as he answered, "I think she's a medium — or a media, or whatever it ought to be called."

"What! one of those spirit-rapping people?" And Archie's hair almost stood on end as he asked the question.

"They don't rap now — not the best of them, that is. That was the old way, and seems to have been given up."

"But what do you suppose she did?"

"How did she know that the money was in your waistcoat pocket, now? How did she know that I came from Warwickshire? And then she had a way of going about the room as though she could have raised herself off her feet in a moment if she had chosen. And then her swearing, and the rest of it — so unlike any other woman, you know."

"But do you think she could have made Julia hate me?"

"Ah! I can't tell that. There are such lots of things going on nowadays that a fellow can understand nothing about! But I've no doubt of this — if you were to tie her up with ropes ever so, I don't in the least doubt but what she'd get out." Archie was awe-struck, and made two or three strokes after this but then he plucked up his courage and asked a question — "Where do you suppose they get it from, Doodles?"

"That's just the question."

"Is it from — the devil, do you think?" said Archie, whispering the name of the Evil One in a very low voice.

"Well, yes, I suppose that's most likely."

"Because they don't seem to do a great deal of harm with it, after all. As for my money, she would have had that any way, for I intended to give it to her."

"There are people who think," said Doodles, "that the spirits don't come from anywhere, but are always floating about."

"And then one person catches them, and another doesn't?" asked Archie.

"They tell me that it depends upon what the mediums or medias eat and drink," said Doodles, "and upon what sort of minds they have. They must be cleverish people, I fancy, or the spirits wouldn't come to them."

"But you never hear of any swell being a medium. Why don't the spirits go to a prime minster or some of those fellows? Only think what a help they'd be."

"If they come from the devil," suggested Doodles, "he wouldn't let them do any real good."

"I've heard a deal about them," said Archie, "and it seems to me that the mediums are always poor people, and that they come from nobody knows where. The Spy is a clever woman I dare say —"

"There isn't much doubt about that," said the admiring Doodles.

"But you can't say she's respectable, you know. If I was a spirit, I wouldn't go to a woman who wore such dirty stockings as she had on."

"That's nonsense, Clavvy. What does a spirit care about a woman's stockings?"

"But why don't they ever go to the wise people? that's what I want to know." And as he asked the question boldly he struck his ball sharply, and, lo! the three balls rolled vanquished into three different pockets. "I don't believe about it," said Archie, as he readjusted the score. "The devil can't do such things as that, or there'd be an end of everything; and as to spirits in the air, why should there be more spirits now than there were four-and-twenty years ago?"

"That's all very well, old fellow," said Doodles, "but you and I ain't clever enough to understand everything." Then that subject was dropped, and Doodles went back for a while to the perils of Jack Stuart's yacht.

After the lunch, which was, in fact, Archie's early dinner, Doodles was going to leave his friend, but Archie insisted that his brother captain should walk with him up to Berkeley Square, and see the last of him into his cab. Doodles had suggested that Sir Hugh would be there, and that Sir Hugh was not always disposed to welcome his brother's friends to his own house after the most comfortable modes of friendship; but Archie explained that on such an occasion as this there need be no fear on that head; he and his brother were going away together, and there was a certain feeling of jollity about the trip which would divest Sir Hugh of his roughness. "And besides," said Archie, "as you will be there to see me off; he'll know that you're not going to stay yourself." Convinced by this, Doodles consented to walk up to Berkeley Square.

Sir Hugh had spent the greatest part of this day at home, immersed among his guns and rods, and their various appurtenances. He also had breakfasted at his club, but had ordered his luncheon to be prepared for him at home. He had arranged to leave Berkeley Square at four, and had directed that his lamb chops should be brought to him exactly at three. He was himself a little late in coming down stairs, and it was ten minutes past the hour when he desired that the chops might be put on the table, saying that he himself would be in the drawing room in time to meet them. He was a man solicitous about his lamb chops, and careful that the asparagus should be hot — solicitous also as to that bottle of Lafitte by which those comestibles were to be accompanied, and which was, of its own nature, too good to be shared with his brother Archie. But as he was on the landing by the drawing room door, descending quickly, conscious that, in obedience to his orders, the chops had been

already served, he was met by a servant who, with disturbed face and quick voice, told him that there was a lady waiting for him in the hall.

"D—— it," said Sir Hugh.

"She has just come, Sir Hugh, and says that she specially wants to see you."

"Why the devil did you let her in?"

"She walked in when the door was opened, Sir Hugh, and I couldn't help it. She seemed to be a lady, Sir Hugh, and I didn't like not to let her inside the door."

"What's the lady's name?" asked the master.

"It's a foreign name, Sir Hugh. She said she wouldn't keep you five minutes." The lamb chops and the asparagus and the Lafitte were in the dining room, and the only way to the dining room lay through the hall to which the foreign lady had obtained an entrance. Sir Hugh, making such calculations as the moments allowed, determined that he would face the enemy, and pass on to his banquet over her prostrate body. He went quickly down into the hall, and there was encountered by Sophie Gordeloup, who, skipping over the gun-cases, and rushing through the portmanteaus, caught the baronet by the arm before he had been able to approach the dining room door. "Sir 'Oo," she said, "I am so glad to have caught you. You are going away, and I have things to tell you which you must hear — yes; it is well for you I have caught you, Sir 'Oo." Sir Hugh looked as though he by no means participated in this feeling, and, saying something about his great hurry, begged that he might be allowed to go to his food. Then he added that, as far as his memory served him, he had not the honor of knowing the lady who was addressing him.

"You come in to your little dinner," said Sophie, "and I will tell you everything as you are eating. Don't mind me. You shall eat and drink, and I will talk. I am Madam Gordeloup — Sophie Gordeloup. Ah! you know the name now. Yes. That is me. Count Pateroff is my brother. You know Count Pateroff? He knowed Lord Ongar, and I knowed Lord Ongar. We know Lady Ongar. Ah! you understand now that I can have much to tell. It is well you was not gone without seeing me! Eh! yes. You shall eat and drink; but suppose you send that man into the kitchen!"

Sir Hugh was so taken by surprise that he hardly knew how to act on the spur of the moment. He certainly had heard of Madam Gordeloup, though he had never before seen her. For years past her name had been familiar to him in London, and when Lady Ongar had returned as a widow it had been, to his thinking, one of her worst offences that this woman had been her friend. Under ordinary circumstances, his judg-

ment would have directed him to desire the servant to put her out into the street as an impostor, and to send for the police if there was any difficulty. But it certainly might be possible that this woman had something to tell with reference to Lady Ongar which it would suit his purposes to hear. At the present moment he was not very well inclined to his sister-in-law, and was disposed to hear evil of her. So he passed on into the dining room and desired Madam Gordeloup to follow him. Then he closed the room door, and standing up with his back to the fireplace, so that he might be saved from the necessity of asking her to sit down, he declared himself ready to hear anything that his visitor might have to say.

"But you will eat your dinner, Sir 'Oo. You will not mind me. I shall not care."

"Thank you, no; if you will just say what you have got to say, I will be obliged to you."

"But the nice things will be so cold! Why should you mind me? Nobody minds me."

"I will wait, if you please, till you have done me the honor of leaving."

"Ah! well, you Englishmen are so cold and ceremonious. But Lord Ongar was not with me like that. I knew Lord Ongar so well."

"Lord Ongar was more fortunate than I am."

"He was a poor man who did kill himself. Yes. It was always that bottle of Cognac. And there was other bottles that was worser still. Never mind; he has gone now, and his widow has got the money. It is she has been a fortunate woman. Sir 'Oo, I will sit down here in the armchair." Sir Hugh made a motion with his hand, not daring to forbid her to do as she was minded. "And you, Sir 'Oo — will not you sit down also?"

"I will continue to stand if you will allow me."

"Very well; you shall do as most pleases you. As I did walk here, and shall walk back, I will sit down."

"And now, if you have anything to say, Madam Gordeloup," said Sir Hugh, looking at the silver covers which were hiding the chops and the asparagus, and looking also at his watch, "perhaps you will be good enough to say it."

"Anything to say! Yes, Sir 'Oo, I have something to say. It is a pity you will not sit at your dinner."

"I will not sit at my dinner till you have left me. So now, if you will be pleased to proceed —"

"I will proceed. Perhaps you don't know that Lord Ongar died in these arms." And Sophie, as she spoke, stretched out her skinny hands, and put herself as far as possible into the attitude in which it would be most convenient to nurse the head of a dying man upon her bosom.

Sir Hugh, thinking to himself that Lord Ongar could hardly have received much consolation in his fate from this incident, declared that he had not heard the fact before. "No, you have not heard it. She have tell nothing to her friends here. He die abroad, and she has come back with all the money; but she tell nothing to any body here, so I must tell."

"But I don't care how he died, Madam Gordeloup. It is nothing to me."

"But yes, Sir 'Oo. The lady, your wife, is the sister to Lady Ongar. Is not that so? Lady Ongar did live with you before she was married. Is not that so? Your brother and your cousin both wishes to marry her and have all the money. Is not that so? Your brother has come to me to help him, and has sent the little man out of Warwickshire. Is not that so?"

"What the d—— is all that to me?" said Sir Hugh, who did not quite understand the story as the lady was telling it.

"I will explain, Sir 'Oo, what the d—— it is to you, only I wish you were eating the nice things on the table. This Lady Ongar is treating me very bad. She treat my brother very bad too. My brother is Count Pateroff. We have been put to, oh, such expenses for her! It have nearly ruined me. I make a journey to your London here altogether for her. Then, for her, I go down to that accursed little island — what you call it? where she insult me. Oh, all my time is gone. Your brother and your cousin, and the little man out of Warwickshire, all coming to my house, just as it please them."

"But what is this to me?" shouted Sir Hugh.

"A great deal to you," screamed back Madam Gordeloup. "You see I know everything — everything. I have got papers."

"What do I care for your papers? Look here Madam Gordeloup, you had better go away."

"Not yet, Sir 'Oo, not yet. You are going away to Norway — I know; and I am ruined before you come back."

"Look here, madam, do you mean that you want money from me?"

"I want my rights, Sir 'Oo. Remember, I know everything — everything — oh, such things! If they were all known — in the newspapers, you understand, or that kind of thing, that lady in Bolton Street would lose all her money tomorrow. Yes. There is uncles to the little lord; yes! Ah! how much would they give me, I wonder? They would not tell me to go away."

Sophie was perhaps justified in the estimate she had made of Sir Hugh's probable character from the knowledge which she had acquired of his brother Archie; but, nevertheless, she had fallen into a great mistake. There could hardly have been a man then in London less likely

to fall into her present views than Sir Hugh Clavering. Not only was he too fond of his money to give it away without knowing why he did so, but he was subject to none of that weakness by which some men are prompted to submit to such extortions. Had he believed her story, and had Lady Ongar been really dear to him, he would never have dealt with such a one as Madam Gordeloup otherwise than through the police.

"Madam Gordeloup," said he, "if you don't immediately take yourself off, I shall have you put out of the house."

He would have sent for a constable at once, had he not feared that by doing so he would retard his journey.

"What!" said Sophie, whose courage was as good as his own. "Me put out of the house! Who shall touch me?"

"My servant shall; or, if that will not do, the police. Come, walk." And he stepped over toward her as though he himself intended to assist in her expulsion by violence.

"Well, you are there; I see you; and what next?" said Sophie. "You, and your valk! I can tell you things fit for you to know, and you say, valk. If I valk, I will valk to some purpose. I do not often valk for nothing when I am told — valk!" Upon this Sir Hugh rang the bell with some violence. "I care nothing for your bells, or for your servants, or for your policemen. I have told you that your sister owe me a great deal of money, and you say — valk. I will valk." Thereupon the servant came into the room, and Sir Hugh, in an angry voice, desired him to open the front door. "Yes — open vide," said Sophie, who, when anger came upon her, was apt to drop into a mode of speaking English, which she was able to avoid in her cooler moments. "Sir 'Oo, I am going to valk, and you shall hear of my valking."

"Am I to take that as a threat?" said he.

"Not a tret at all," said she; "only a promise. Ah! I am good to keep my promises. Yes, I make a promise. Your poor wife — down with the daises; I know all, and she shall hear, too. That is another promise. And your brother, the captain. Oh! here he is, and the little man out of Warwickshire." She had got up from her chair, and had moved toward the door with the intention of going, but just as she was passing out into the hall she encountered Archie and Doodles. Sir Hugh, who had been altogether at a loss to understand what she had meant by the man out of Warwickshire, followed her into the hall, and became more angry than before at finding that his brother had brought a friend to his house at so very inopportune a moment. The wrath in his face was so plainly expressed that Doodles could perceive it, and wished himself away. The presence also of the spy was not pleasant to the gallant captain. Was the wonderful woman ubiquitous, that he should thus encounter her again,

and that so soon after all the things that he had spoken of her on this morning? "How do you do, gentlemen?" said Sophie. "There is a great many boxes here, and I with my crinoline have not got room." Then she shook hands, first with Archie, and then with Doodles, and asked the latter why he was not as yet gone to Warwickshire. Archie, in almost mortal fear, looked up into his brother's face. Had his brother learned the story of that seventy pounds? Sir Hugh was puzzled beyond measure at finding that the woman knew the two men; but, having still an eye to his lamb chops, was chiefly anxious to get rid of Sophie and Doodles together.

"This is my friend Boodle — Captain Boodle," said Archie, trying to put a bold face upon the crisis. "He has come to see me off."

"Very kind of him," said Sir Hugh. "Just make way for this lady, will you? I want to get her out of the house if I can. Your friend seems to know her; perhaps he'll be good enough to give her his arm."

"Who — I?" said Doodles. "No, I don't know her particularly. I did meet her once before, just once — in a casual way."

"Captain Booddle and me is very good friends," said Sophie. "He come to my house and behave himself very well; only he is not so handy a man as your brother, Sir 'Oo."

Archie trembled, and he trembled still more when his brother, turning to him, asked him if he knew the woman.

"Yes, he know the woman very well," said Sophie. "Why do you not come anymore to see me? You send your little friend, but I like you better yourself. You come again when you return, and all that shall be made right."

But still she did not go. She had now seated herself on a gun case which was resting on a portmanteau, and seemed to be at her ease. The time was going fast, and Sir Hugh, if he meant to eat his chops, must eat them at once.

"See her out of the hall into the street," he said to Archie; "and if she gives trouble, send for the police. She has come here to get money from me by threats, and only that we have no time, I would have her taken to the lock-up house at once." Then Sir Hugh retreated into the dining room and shut the door.

"Lock-up 'ouse!" said Sophie, scornfully. "What is dat?"

"He means a prison," said Doodles.

"Prison! I know who is most likely to be in a prison. Tell me of a prison! Is he a minister of state that he can send out order for me to be made prisoner? Is there lettres de cachet now in England? I think not. Prison, indeed!"

"But really, Madam Gordeloup, you had better go-you had, indeed," said Archie.

"You too — you bid me go? Did I bid you go when you came to me? Did I not tell you sit down? Was I not polite? Did I send for a police, or talk of lock-up 'ouse to you? No. It is English that do these things — only English."

Archie felt that it was incumbent on him to explain that his visit to her house had been made under other circumstances — that he had brought money instead of seeking it; and had, in fact, gone to her simply in the way of her own trade. He did begin some preliminaries to this explanation; but as the servant was there, and as his brother might come out from the dining room, and as also he was aware that he could hardly tell the story much to his own advantage, he stopped abruptly, and, looking piteously at Doodles, implored him to take the lady away.

"Perhaps you wouldn't mind just seeing her into Mount Street," said Archie.

"Who — I?" said Doodles, electrified.

"It is only just around the corner," said Archie.

"Yes, Captain Booddle, we will go," said Sophie. "This is a bad house; and your Sir 'Oo — I do not like him at all. Lock-up, indeed! I tell you he shall very soon be locked up himself. There is what you call Davy's locker. I know — yes."

Doodles also trembled when he heard this anathema, and thought once more of the character of Jack Stuart and his yacht.

"Pray go with her," said Archie.

"But I had come to see you off."

"Never mind," said Archie. "He is in such a taking, you know. God bless you, old fellow — good-bye! I'll write and tell you what fish we get, and mind you tell me what Turriper does for the Bedfordshire. Good-bye, Madam Gordeloup; good-bye."

There was no escape for him, so Doodles put on his hat and prepared to walk away to Mount Street with the Spy under his arm — the Spy as to whose avocations, over and beyond those of her diplomatic profession, he had such strong suspicions! He felt inclined to be angry with his friend, but the circumstances of his parting hardly admitted of any expression of anger.

"Good-bye, Clavvy," he said. "Yes, I'll write — that is, if I've got anything to say.

"Take care of yourself; captain," said Sophie.

"All right," said Archie.

"Mind you come and see me when you come back," said Sophie.

"Of course I will," said Archie.

"And we'll make that all right for you yet. Gentlemen, when they have so much to gain, shouldn't take a no too easy. You come with your handy glove, and we'll see about it again." Then Sophie walked off leaning upon the arm of Captain Boodle, and Archie stood at the door watching them till they turned out of sight round the corner of tire Square. At last he saw them no more, and then he returned to his brother.

And as we shall see Doodles no more — or almost no more—we will now bid him adieu civilly. The pair were not ill-matched, though the lady perhaps had some advantage in acuteness, given to her no doubt by the experience of a longer life. Doodles, as he walked along two sides of the square with the fair burden on his arm, felt himself to be in some sort proud of his position, though it was one from which he would not have been sorry to escape, had escape been possible. A remarkable phenomenon was the Spy, and to have walked round Berkeley Square with such a woman leaning on his arm might in coming years be an event to remember with satisfaction. In the meantime he did not say much to her, and did not quite understand all that she said to him. At last he came to the door which he well remembered, and then he paused. He did not escape even then. After a while the door was opened, and those who were passing might have seen Captain Boodle, slowly and with hesitating steps, enter the narrow passage before the lady. Then Sophie followed, and closed the door behind her. As far as this story goes, what took place at that interview can not be known. Let us bid farewell to Doodles, and wish him a happy escape.

"How did you come to know that woman?" said Hugh to his brother, as soon as Archie was in the dining room.

"She was a friend of Julia's," said Archie.

"You haven't given her money?" Hugh asked.

"Oh dear, no," said Archie.

Immediately after that they got into their cab, the things were pitched on the top, and, in a while, we may bid adieu to them also.

Chapter XLVI

Showing How Mrs. Burton Fought Her Battle

“*F*lorence, I have been to Bolton Street, and I have seen Lady Ongar.” Those were the first words which Cecilia Burton spoke to her sister-in-law, when she found Florence in the drawing room on her return from the visit which she had made to the countess. Florence had still before her the desk on which she had been writing; and the letter in its envelope, addressed to Mrs. Clavering, but as yet unclosed, was lying beneath her blotting-paper. Florence, who had never dreamed of such an undertaking on Cecilia’s part, was astounded at the tidings which she heard. Of course her first effort was made to learn from her sister’s tone and countenance what had been the result of this interview; but she could learn nothing from either. There was no radiance as of joy in Mrs. Burton’s face, nor was there written there anything of despair. Her voice was serious and almost solemn, and her manner was very grave, but that was all. “You have seen her?” said Florence, rising up from her chair.

“Yes, dear, I may have done wrong. Theodore, I know, will say so. But I thought it best to try to learn the truth before you wrote to Mrs. Clavering.”

“And what is the truth? But perhaps you have not learned it.”

“I think I have learned all that she could tell me. She has been very frank.”

“Well, what is the truth? Do not suppose, dearest, that I can not bear it. I hope for nothing now. I only want to have this settled, that I may be at rest.”

Upon this Mrs. Burton took the suffering girl in her arms and caressed her tenderly. “My love,” said she, “it is not easy for us to be at rest. You can not be at rest as yet.”

“I can. I will be so, when I know that this is settled. I do not wish to interfere with his fortune. There is my letter to his mother, and now I will go back to Stratton.”

"Not yet, dearest, not yet," said Mrs. Burton, taking the letter in her hand, but refraining from withdrawing it at once from the envelope. "You must hear what I have heard today."

"Does she say that she loves him?"

"Ah! yes — she loves him. We must not doubt that."

"And he — what does she say of him?"

"She says what you also must say, Florence, though it is hard that it should be so. It must be as he shall decide."

"No." said Florence, withdrawing herself from the arm that was still around her, "no, it shall not be as he may choose to decide. I will not so submit myself to him. It is enough as it is. I will never see him more — never. To say that I do not love him would be untrue, but I will never see him again."

"Stop, dear, stop. What if it be no fault of his?"

"No fault of his that he went to her when we — we — we — he and I — were, as we were, together!"

"Of course there has been some fault; but Flo, dearest, listen to me. You know that I would ask you to do nothing from which a woman should shrink."

"I know that you would give your heart's blood for me; but nothing will be of avail now. Do not look at me with melancholy eyes like that. Cissy, it will not kill me. It is only the doubt that kills one."

"I will not look at you with melancholy eyes, but you must listen to me. She does not herself know what his intention is."

"But I know it, and I know my own. Read my letter, Cissy. There is not one word of anger in it, nor will I ever utter a reproach. He knew her first. If he loved her through it all, it was a pity he could not be constant to his love, even though she was false to him."

"But you won't hear me, Flo. As far as I can learn the truth — as I myself most firmly believe — when he went to her on her return to England, he had no other intention than that of visiting an old friend."

"But what sort of friend, Cissy?"

"He had no idea then of being untrue to you. But when he saw her, the old intimacy came back. That was natural. Then he was dazzled by her beauty."

"Is she then so beautiful?"

"She is very beautiful."

"Let him go to her," said Florence, tearing herself away from her sister's arm, and walking across the room with a quick and almost angry step. "Let her have him. Cissy, there shall be an end of it. I will not condescend to solicit his love. If she is such as you say, and if beauty

with him goes for everything, what chance could there be for such as me?"

"I did not say that beauty with him went for everything."

"Of course it does. I ought to have known that it would be so with such a one as him. And then she is rich also — wonderfully rich! What right can I have to think of him?"

"Florence, you are unjust. You do not even suspect that it is her money."

"To me it is the same thing. I suppose that a woman who is so beautiful has a right to everything. I know that I am plain, and I will be — content — in future — to think no more —" Poor Florence, when she had got as far as that, broke down, and could go on no further with the declaration which she had been about to make as to her future prospects. Mrs. Burton, taking advantage of this, went on with her story, struggling, not altogether unsuccessfully, to assume a calm tone of unimpassioned reason.

"As I said before, he was dazzled —"

"Dazzled! oh!"

"But even then he had no idea of being untrue to you."

"No; he was untrue without an idea. That is worse."

"Florence, you are perverse, and are determined to be unfair. I must beg that you will hear me to the end, so that then you may be able to judge what course you ought to follow." This Mrs. Burton said with an air of great authority; after which she continued in a voice something less stern — "He thought of doing no injury to you when he went to see her; but something of the feeling of his old love grew upon him when he was in her company, and he became embarrassed by his position before he was aware of his own danger. He might, of course, have been stronger." Here Florence exhibited a gesture of strong impatience, though she did not speak. "I am not going to defend him altogether, but I think you must admit that he was hardly tried. Of course I can not say what passed between them, but I can understand how easily they might recur to the old scenes — how naturally she would wish for a renewal of the love which she had been base enough to betray! She does not, however, consider herself as at present engaged to him. That you may know for certain. It may be that she has asked him for such a promise, and that he has hesitated. If so, his staying away from us, and his not writing to you, can be easily understood."

"And what is it you would have me do?"

"He is ill now. Wait till he is well. He would have been here before this had not his illness prevented him. Wait till he comes."

"I can not do that, Cissy. Wait I must, but I can not wait without offering him, through his mother, the freedom which I have so much reason to know that he desires."

"We do not know that he desires it. We do not know that his mother even suspects him of any fault toward you. Now that he is there — at home — away from Bolton Street —"

"I do not care to trust to such influences as that, Cissy. If he could not spend this morning with her in her own house, and then, as he left her, feel that he preferred me to her, and to all the world, I would rather be as I am than take his hand. He shall not marry me from pity, nor yet from a sense of duty. We know the old story — how the Devil would be a monk when he was sick. I will not accept his sick-bed allegiance, or have to think that I owe my husband to a mother's influence over him while he is ill."

"You will make me think, Flo, that you are less true to him than she is."

"Perhaps it is so. Let him have what good such truth as hers can do him. For me, I feel that it is my duty to be true to myself. I will not condescend to indulge my heart at the cost of my pride as a woman."

"Oh, Florence, I hate that word pride."

"You would not hate it for yourself in my place."

"You need take no shame to love him."

"Have I taken shame to love him?" said Florence, rising again from her chair. "Have I been missish or coy about my love? From the moment in which I knew that it was a pleasure to myself to regard him as my future husband, I have spoken of my love as being always proud of it. I have acknowledged it as openly as you can do yours for Theodore. I acknowledge it still, and will never deny it. Take shame that I have loved him! No. But I should take to myself great shame should I ever be brought so low as to ask him for his love, when once I had learned to think that he had transferred it from myself to another woman." Then she walked the length of the room, backward and forward, with hasty steps, not looking at her sister-in-law, whose eyes were now filled with tears. "Come, Cissy," she then said, "we will make an end of this. Read my letter if you choose to read it — though indeed it is not worth reading — and then let me send it to the post."

Mrs. Burton now opened the letter and read it very slowly. It was stern and almost unfeeling in the calmness of the words chosen; but in those words her proposed marriage with Harry Clavering was absolutely abandoned. "I know," she said, "that your son is more warmly attached to another lady than he is to me, and under those circumstance; for his sake as well as for mine, it is necessary that we should part. Dear Mrs.

Clavering, may I ask you to make him understand that he and I are never to recur to the past? If he will send me back any letters of mine — should any have been kept — and the little present which I once gave him, all will have been done which need be done, and all have been said which need be said. He will receive in a small parcel his own letters and the gifts which he has made me." There was in this a tone of completeness — as of business absolutely finished — of a judgment admitting no appeal, which did not at all suit Mrs. Burton's views. A letter, quite as becoming on the part of Florence, might, she thought, be written, which would still leave open a door for reconciliation. But Florence was resolved, and the letter was sent.

The part which Mrs. Burton had taken in this conversation had surprised even herself. She had been full of anger with Harry Clavering — as wrathful with him as her nature permitted her to be, and yet she had pleaded his cause with all her eloquence, going almost so far in her defense of him as to declare that he was blameless. And, in truth, she was prepared to acquit him of blame — to give him full absolution without penance — if only he could be brought back again into the fold. Her wrath against him would be very hot should he not so return; but all should be more than forgiven, if he would only come back, and do his duty with affectionate and patient fidelity. Her desire was, not so much that justice should be done, as that Florence should have the thing coveted, and that Florence's rival should not have it. According to the arguments as arranged by her feminine logic, Harry Clavering would be all right or all wrong according as he might at last bear himself. She desired success, and, if she could only be successful, was prepared to forgive everything. And even yet she would not give up the battle, though she admitted to herself that Florence's letter to Mrs. Clavering made the contest more difficult than ever. It might, however, be that Mrs. Clavering would be good enough, just enough, true enough, clever enough, to know that such a letter as this, coming from such a girl, and written under such circumstances, should be taken as meaning nothing. Most mothers would wish to see their sons married to wealth, should wealth throw itself in their way; but Mrs. Clavering, possibly, might not be such a mother as that.

In the meantime, there was before her the terrible necessity of explaining to her husband the step which she had taken without his knowledge, and of which she knew that she must tell him the history before she could sit down to dinner with him in comfort. "Theodore," she said, creeping in out of her own chamber to his dressing-room, while he was washing his hands, "you mustn't be angry with me, but I have done something today."

"And why must I not be angry with you?"

"You know what I mean. You mustn't be angry — especially about this — because I don't want you to be."

"That's conclusive," said he. It was manifest to her that he was in a good humor, which was a great blessing. He had not been tired with his work, as he was often wont to be, and was therefore willing to be playful.

"What do you think I've done?" said she. "I have been to Bolton Street, and have seen Lady Ongar."

"No!"

"I have, Theodore, indeed."

Mr. Burton had been rubbing his face vehemently with a rough towel at the moment in which the communication had been made to him, and so strongly was he affected by it that he was stopped in his operation and brought to a stand in his movement, looking at his wife over the towel as he held it in both hands. "What on earth has made you do such a thing as that?" he said.

"I thought it best. I thought that I might hear the truth — and so I have. I could not bear that Florence should be sacrificed while anything remained undone that was possible."

"Why didn't you tell me that you were going?"

"Well, my dear, I thought it better not. Of course I ought to have told you, but in this instance I thought it best just to go without the fuss of mentioning it."

"What you really mean is, that if you had told me I should have asked you not to go."

"Exactly."

"And you were determined to have your own way."

"I don't think, Theodore, I care so much about my own way as some women do. I am sure I always think your opinion is better than my own — that is, in most things."

"And what did Lady Ongar say to you?" He had now put down the towel, and was seated in his armchair, looking up into his wife's face.

"It would be a long story to tell you all that she said."

"Was she civil to you?"

"She was not uncivil. She is a handsome, proud woman, prone to speak out what she thinks, and determined to have her own way when it is possible; but I think that she intended to be civil to me personally."

"What is her purpose now?"

"Her purpose is clear enough. She means to marry Harry Clavering if she can get him. She said so. She made no secret of what her wishes are."

"Then, Cissy, let her marry him; and do not let us trouble ourselves further in the matter."

"But Florence, Theodore! Think of Florence!"

"I am thinking of her, and I think that Harry Clavering is not worth her acceptance. She is as the traveler that fell among thieves. She is hurt and wounded, but not dead. It is for you to be the good Samaritan, but the oil which you should pour into her wounds is not a renewed hope as to that worthless man. Let Lady Ongar have him. As far as I can see, they are fit for each other."

Then she went through with him, diligently, all the arguments which she had used with Florence, palliating Harry's conduct, and explaining the circumstances of his disloyalty, almost as those circumstances had in truth occurred. "I think you are too hard on him," she said. "You can't be too hard on falsehood," he replied. "No, not while it exists. But you would not be angry with a man forever because he should once have been false? But we do not know that he is false." "Do we not?" said he. "But never mind; we must go to dinner now. Does Florence know of your visit?" Then, before she would allow him to leave his room, she explained to him what had taken place between herself and Florence, and told him of the letter that had been written to Mrs. Clavering. "She is right," said he. "That way out of her difficulty is the best that is left to her." But, nevertheless, Mrs. Burton was resolved that she would not as yet surrender.

Theodore Burton, when he reached the drawing room, went up to his sister and kissed her. Such a sign of the tenderness of love was not common with him, for he was one of those who are not usually demonstrative in their affection. At the present moment he said nothing of what was passing in his mind, nor did she. She simply raised her face to meet his lips, and pressed his hand as she held it. What need was there of any further sign between them than this? Then they went to dinner, and their meal was eaten almost in silence. Almost every moment Cecilia's eye was on her sister-in-law. A careful observer, had there been one there, might have seen this; but, while they remained together down stairs, there occurred among them nothing else to mark that all was not well with them.

Nor would the brother have spoken a word during the evening on the subject that was so near to all their hearts had not Florence led the way. When they were at tea, and when Cecilia had already made up her mind that there was to be no further discussion that night, Florence suddenly broke forth.

"Theodore," she said, "I have been thinking much about it, and I believe I had better go home, to Stratton, tomorrow."

"Oh, no," said Cecilia, eagerly.

"I believe it will be better that I should," continued Florence. "I suppose it is very weak in me to own it; but I am unhappy, and, like the wounded bird, I feel that it will be well that I should hide myself."

Cecilia was at her feet in a moment. "Dearest Flo," she said, "is not this your home as well as Stratton?"

"When I am able to be happy, it is. Those who have light hearts may have more homes than one, but it is not so with those whose hearts are heavy. I think it will be best for me to go."

"You shall do exactly as you please," said her brother. "In such a matter I will not try to persuade you. I only wish that we could tend to comfort you."

"You do comfort me. If I know that you think I am doing right, that will comfort me more than anything. Absolute and immediate comfort is not to be had when one is sorrowful."

"No, indeed," said her brother. "Sorrow should not be killed too quickly. I always think that those who are impervious to grief must be impervious also to happiness. If you have feelings capable of the one, you must have them capable also of the other."

"You should, wait, at any rate, till you get an answer from Mrs. Clavering," said Cecilia.

"I do not know that she has any answer to send to me."

"Oh yes, she must answer you, if you will think of it. If she accepts what you have said —"

"She can not but accept it."

"Then she must reply to you. There is something which you have asked her to send to you; and I think you should wait, at any rate, till it reaches you here. Mind, I do not think her answer will be of that nature, but it is clear that you should wait for it, whatever it may be." Then Florence, with the concurrence of her brother's opinion, consented to remain in London for a few days, expecting the answer which would be sent by Mrs. Clavering; and after that no further discussion took place as to her trouble.

Chapter XLVII

The Sheep Returns To The Fold

Harry Clavering had spoken solemn words to his mother, during his illness, which both he and she regarded as a promise that Florence should not be deserted by him. After that promise nothing more was said between them on the subject for a few days. Mrs. Clavering was contented that the promise had been made, and Harry himself, in the weakness consequent upon his illness, was willing enough to accept the excuse which his illness gave him for postponing any action in the matter. But the fever had left him, and he was sitting up in his mother's room, when Florence's letter reached the parsonage, and with the letter, the little parcel which she herself had packed up so carefully. On the day before that a few words had passed between the rector and his wife, which will explain the feelings of both of them in the matter.

"Have you heard," said he, speaking in a voice hardly above a whisper, although no third person was in the room, "that Harry is again thinking of making Julia his wife?"

"He is not thinking of doing so," said Mrs. Clavering. "They who say so do him wrong."

"It would be a great thing for him as regards money."

"But he is engaged — and Florence Burton has been received here as his future wife. I could not endure to think that it should be so. At any rate, it is not true."

"I only tell you what I heard," said the rector, gently sighing, partly in obedience to his wife's implied rebuke, and partly at the thought that so grand a marriage should not be within his son's reach. The rector was beginning to be aware that Harry would hardly make a fortune at the profession which he had chosen, and that a rich marriage would be an easy way out of all the difficulties which such a failure promised. The rector was a man who dearly loved easy ways out of difficulties. But in such matters as these his wife he knew was imperative and powerful,

and he lacked the courage to plead for a cause that was prudent, but ungenerous.

When Mrs. Clavering received the letter and parcel on the next morning, Harry Clavering was still in bed. With the delightful privilege of a convalescent invalid, he was allowed in these days to get up just when getting up became more comfortable than lying in bed, and that time did not usually come till eleven o'clock was past; but the postman reached the Clavering parsonage by nine. The letter, as we know, was addressed to Mrs. Clavering herself, as was also the outer envelope which contained the packet; but the packet itself was addressed in Florence's clear handwriting to Harry Clavering, Esq.

"That is a large parcel to come by post, mamma," said Fanny.

"Yes, my dear; but it is something particular."

"It's from some tradesman, I suppose," said the rector.

"No, it's not from a tradesman," said Mrs. Clavering. But she said nothing further, and both husband and daughter perceived that it was not intended that they should ask further questions.

Fanny, as usual, had taken her brother his breakfast, and Mrs. Clavering did not go up to him till that ceremony had been completed and removed. Indeed it was necessary that she should study Florence's letter in her own room before she could speak to him about it. What the parcel contained she well knew, even before the letter had been thoroughly read; and I need hardly say that the treasure was sacred in her hands. When she had finished the perusal of the letter there was a tear — a gentle tear — in each eye. She understood it all, and could fathom the strength and weakness of every word which Florence had written. But she was such a woman — exactly such a woman — as Cecilia Burton had pictured to herself. Mrs. Clavering was good enough, great enough, true enough, clever enough to know that Harry's love for Florence should be sustained, and his fancy for Lady Ongar overcome. At no time would she have been proud to see her son prosperous only in the prosperity of a wife's fortune; but she would have been thoroughly ashamed of him had he resolved to pursue such prosperity under his present circumstances.

But her tears — though they were there in the corners of her eyes — were not painful tears. Dear Florence! She is suffering bitterly now. This very day would be a day of agony to her. There had been for her, doubtless, many days of agony during the past month. That the letter was true in all its words Mrs. Clavering did not doubt. That Florence believed that all was over between her and Harry, Mrs. Clavering was as sure as Florence had intended that she should be. But all should not be over, and the days of agony should soon be at an end. Her boy had

promised her, and to her he had always been true. And she understood, too, the way in which these dangers had come upon him, and her judgment was not heavy upon her son — her gracious boy, who had ever been so good to her! It might be that he had been less diligent at his work than he should have been — that on that account further delay would still be necessary; but Florence would forgive that, and he had promised that Florence should not be deserted.

Then she took the parcel in her hands, and considered all its circumstances — how precious had once been its contents, and how precious doubtless they still were, though they had been thus repudiated! And she thought of the moments — nay, rather the hours — which had been passed in the packing of that little packet. She well understood how a girl would linger over such dear pain, touching the things over and over again, allowing herself to read morsels of the letters at which she had already forbidden herself even to look, till every word had been again seen and weighed, again caressed and again abjured. She knew how those little trinkets would have been fondled! How salt had been the tears that had fallen on them, and how carefully the drops would have been removed. Every fold in the paper of the two envelopes, with the little morsels of wax just adequate for their purpose, told of the lingering, painful care with which the work had been done. Ah! the parcel should go back at once with words of love that should put an end to all that pain. She who had sent these loved things away, should have her letters again, and should touch her little treasures with fingers that should take pleasure in the touching. She should again read her lover's words with an enduring delight. Mrs. Clavering understood it all, as though she were still a girl with a lover of her own.

Harry was beginning to think that the time had come in which getting up would be more comfortable than lying in bed, when his mother knocked at his door and entered his room. "I was just going to make a move, mother," he said, having reached that stage of convalescence in which some shame comes upon the idler.

"But I want to speak to you first, my dear," said Mrs. Clavering. "I have got a letter for you, or rather a parcel." Harry held out his hand, and, taking the packet, at once recognized the writing of the address.

"You know from whom it comes, Harry?"

"Oh yes, mother."

"And do you know what it contains?" Harry, still holding the packet, looked at it, but said nothing. "I know," said his mother, "for she has written and told me. Will you see her letter to me?" Again Harry held out his hand, but his mother did not at once give him the letter. "First

of all, my dear, let us know that we understand each other. This dear girl — to me she is inexpressibly dear — is to be your wife.”

“Yes, mother, it shall be so.”

“That is my own boy! Harry, I have never doubted you — have never doubted that you would be right at last. Now you shall see her letter. But you must remember that she has had cause to make her unhappy.”

“I will remember.”

“Had you not been ill, everything would of course have been all right before now.” As to the correctness of this assertion the reader probably will have doubts of his own. Then she handed him the letter, and sat on his bedside while he read it. At first he was startled, and made almost indignant at the firmness of the girl’s words. She gave him up as though it were a thing quite decided, and uttered no expression of her own regret in doing so. There was no soft woman’s wail in her words. But there was in them something which made him unconsciously long to get back the thing which he had so nearly thrown away from him. They inspired him with a doubt whether he might yet succeed, which very doubt greatly increased his desire. As he read the letter for the second time, Julia became less beautiful in his imagination; and the charm of Florence’s character became stronger.

“Well, dear,” said his mother, when she saw that he had finished the second reading of the epistle.

He hardly knew how to express, even to his mother, all his feelings — the shame that he felt, and with the shame something of indignation that he should have been so repulsed. And of his love, too, he was afraid to speak. He was willing enough to give the required assurance, but after that he would have preferred to have been left alone. But his mother could not leave him without some further word of agreement between them as to the course which they would pursue.

“Will you write to her, mother, or shall I?”

“I shall write, certainly — by today’s post. I would not leave her an hour, if I could help it, without an assurance of your unaltered affection.”

“I could go to town tomorrow, mother — could I not?”

“Not tomorrow, Harry. It would be foolish. Say on Monday.”

“And you will write today?”

“Certainly.”

“I will send a line also — just a line.”

“And the parcel?”

“I have not opened it yet.”

“You know what it contains. Send it back at once, Harry — at once. If I understand her feelings, she will not be happy till she gets it into

her hands again. We will send Jem over to the post office, and have it registered."

When so much was settled, Mrs. Clavering went away about the affairs of her house, thinking as she did so of the loving words with which she would strive to give back happiness to Florence Burton.

Harry, when he was alone, slowly opened the parcel. He could not resist the temptation of doing this, and of looking again at the things which she had sent back to him. And he was not without an idea — perhaps a hope — that there might be with them some short note — some scrap containing a few words for himself. If he had any such hope he was disappointed. There were his own letters, all scented with lavender from the casket in which they had been preserved; there was the rich bracelet which had been given with some little ceremony, and the cheap brooch which he had thrown to her as a joke, and which she had sworn that she would value the most of all because she could wear it every day; and there was the pencil-case which he had fixed on to her watch-chain, while her fingers were touching his fingers, caressing him for his love while her words were rebuking him for his awkwardness. He remembered it all as the things lay strewed upon his bed. And he re-read every word of his own words. "What a fool a man makes of himself!" he said to himself at last, with something of the cheeriness of laughter about his heart. But as he said so he was quite ready to make himself a fool after the same fashion again, if only there were not in his way that difficulty of recommencing. Had it been possible for him to write again at once in the old strain, without any reference to his own conduct during the last month, he would have begun his fooling without waiting to finish his dressing.

"Did you open the parcel?" his mother asked him, some hour or so before it was necessary that Jem should be started on his mission.

"Yes, I thought it best to open it."

"And have you made it up again?"

"Not yet, mother."

"Put this with it, dear." And his mother gave him a little jewel, a cupid in mosaic surrounded by tiny diamonds, which he remembered her to wear ever since he had first noticed the things she had worn. "Not from me, mind. I give it to you. Come — will you trust me to pack them?" Then Mrs. Clavering again made up the parcel, and added the trinket which she had brought with her.

Harry at last brought himself to write a few words.

DEAREST, DEAREST FLORENCE: —

They will not let me out, or I would go to you at once. My mother has written, and though I have not seen her letter, I know what it contains. Indeed, indeed you may believe it all. May I not venture to return the parcel? I do send it back, and implore you to keep it. I shall be in town, I think, on Monday, and will go to Onslow Crescent — instantly.

Your own, H.C.

Then there was scrawled a postscript which was worth all the rest put together — was better than his own note, better than his mother's letter, better than the returned packet. "I love no one better than you — no one half so well — neither now, nor ever did." These words, whether wholly true or only partially so, were at least to the point, and were taken by Cecilia Burton, when she heard of them, as a confession of faith that demanded instant and plenary absolution.

The trouble which had called Harry down to Clavering remained I regret to say, almost in full force now that his prolonged visit had been brought so near its close. Mr. Saul, indeed, had agreed to resign his curacy, and was already on the look-out for similar employment in some other parish. And, since his interview with Fanny's father, he had never entered the rectory or spoken to Fanny. Fanny had promised that there should be no such speaking, and, indeed, no danger of that kind was feared. Whatever Mr. Saul might do, he would do openly — nay, audaciously. But, though there existed this security, nevertheless things as regarded Fanny were very unpleasant. When Mr. Saul had commenced his courtship, she had agreed with her family in almost ridiculing the idea of such a lover. There had been a feeling with her as with the others, that poor Mr. Saul was to be pitied. Then she had come to regard his overtures as matters of grave import — not, indeed, avowing to her mother anything so strong as a return of his affection, but speaking of his proposal as one to which there was no other objection than that of a want of money. Now, however, she went moping about the house as though she were a victim of true love, condemned to run unsmoothly forever — as though her passion for Mr. Saul were too much for her, and she were waiting in patience till death should relieve her from the cruelty of her parents. She never complained. Such victims never do complain. But she moped and was wretched, and when her mother questioned her, struggling to find out how strong this feeling might in truth be, Fanny would simply make her dutiful promises — promises which were wickedly dutiful — that she would never mention the name of Mr. Saul anymore. Mr. Saul, in the meantime, went about his parish duties with grim energy, supplying the rector's shortcomings without a

word. He would have been glad to preach all the sermons and read all the services during these six months, had he been allowed to do so. He was constant in the schools — more constant than ever in his visitings. He was very courteous to Mr. Clavering when the necessities of their position brought them together. For all this, Mr. Clavering hated him — unjustly. For a man placed as Mr. Saul was placed, a line of conduct exactly level with that previously followed is impossible, and it was better that he should become more energetic in his duties than less so. It will be easily understood that all these things interfered much with the general happiness of the family at the rectory at this time.

The Monday came, and Harry Clavering, now convalescent, and simply interesting from the remaining effects of his illness, started on his journey for London. There had come no further letters from Onslow Terrace to the parsonage, and, indeed, owing to the intervention of Sunday, none could have come unless Florence had written by return of post. Harry made his journey, beginning with some promise of happiness to himself; but becoming somewhat uneasy as his train drew near to London. He had behaved badly, and he knew that in the first place he must own that he had done so. To men such a necessity is always grievous. Women not infrequently like the task. To confess, submit, and be accepted as confessing and submitting, comes naturally to the feminine mind. The cry of peccavi sounds soft and pretty when made by sweet lips in a loving voice. But a man who can own that he has done amiss without a pang — who can so own it to another man, or even to a woman — is usually but a poor creature. Harry must now make such confession, and therefore he became uneasy. And then, for him, there was another task behind the one which he would be called upon to perform this evening — a task which would have nothing of pleasantness in it to redeem its pain. He must confess not only to Florence — where his confession might probably have its reward — but he must confess also to Julia. This second confession would, indeed, be a hard task to him. That, however was to be postponed till the morrow. On this evening he had pledged himself that he would go direct to Onslow Terrace, and this he did as soon after he had reached his lodgings as was possible. It was past six when he reached London, and it was not yet eight when, with palpitating heart, he knocked at Mr. Burton's door.

I must take the reader back with me for a few minutes, in order that we may see after what fashion the letters from Clavering were received by the ladies in Onslow Terrace. On that day Mr. Burton had been required to go out of London by one of the early trains, and had not been in the house when the postman came. Nothing had been said between Cecilia and Florence as to their hopes or fears in regard to an

answer from Clavering — nothing, at least, since that conversation in which Florence had agreed to remain in London for yet a few days; but each of them was very nervous on the matter. Any answer, if sent at once from Clavering, would arrive on this morning, and, therefore, when the well-known knock was heard, neither of them was able to maintain her calmness perfectly. But yet nothing was said, nor did either of them rise from her seat at the breakfast table. Presently the girl came in with apparently a bundle of letters, which she was still sorting when she entered the room. There were two or three for Mr. Burton, two for Cecilia, and then two besides the registered packet for Florence. For that a receipt was needed, and as Florence had seen the address and recognized the writing, she was hardly able to give her signature. As soon as the maid was gone Cecilia could keep her seat no longer. "I know those are from Clavering," she said, rising from her chair, and coming round to the side of the table. Florence instinctively swept the packet into her lap, and, leaning forward, covered the letters with her hands. "Oh, Florence, let us see them — let us see them at once. If we are to be happy, let us know it." But Florence paused, still leaning over her treasures, and hardly daring to show her burning face. Even yet it might be that she was rejected. Then Cecilia went back to her seat, and simply looked at her sister with beseeching eyes. "I think I'll go up stairs," said Florence. "Are you afraid of me, Flo?" Cecilia answered reproachfully. "Let me see the outside of them." Then Florence brought them round the table, and put them into her sister's hands. "May I open this one from Mrs. Clavering?" Florence nodded her head. Then the seal was broken, and in one minute the two women were crying in each other's arms. "I was quite sure of it," said Cecilia, through her tears — "perfectly sure. I never doubted it for a moment. How could you have talked of going to Stratton?" At last Florence got herself away up to the window, and gradually mustered courage to break the envelope of her lover's letter. It was not at once that she showed the postscript to Cecilia, nor at once that the packet was opened. That last ceremony she did perform in the solitude of her own room. But before the day was over the postscript had been shown, and the added trinket had been exhibited. "I remember it well," said Florence. "Mrs. Clavering wore it on her forehead when we dined at Lady Clavering's." Mrs. Burton in all this saw something of the gentle persuasion which the mother had used, but of that she said nothing. That he should be back again, and should have repented, was enough for her.

Mr. Burton was again absent when Harry Clavering knocked in person at the door, but on this occasion his absence had been specially arranged by him with a view to Harry's comfort. "He won't want to see

me this evening," he had said. "Indeed, you'll all get along a great deal better without me." He therefore had remained away from home, and, not being a club man, had dined most uncomfortably at an eating-house. "Are the ladies at home?" Harry asked, when the door was opened. Oh yes, they were at home. There was no danger that they should be found out on such an occasion as this. The girl looked at him pleasantly, calling him by his name as she answered him, as though she too desired to show him that he had again been taken into favor — into her favor as well as that of her mistress.

He hardly knew what he was doing as he ran up the steps to the drawing room. He was afraid of what was to come, but nevertheless he rushed at his fate as some young soldier rushes at the trench in which he feels that he may probably fall. So Harry Clavering hurried on, and before he had looked round upon the room which he had entered, found his fate with Florence on his bosom.

Alas! alas! I fear that justice was outraged in the welcome that Harry received on that evening. I have said that he would be called upon to own his sins, and so much, at least, should have been required of him. But he owned no sin. I have said that a certain degradation must attend him in that first interview after his reconciliation. Instead of this, the hours that he spent that evening in Onslow Terrace were hours of one long ovation. He was, as it were, put upon a throne as a king who had returned from his conquest, and those two women did him honor, almost kneeling at his feet. Cecilia was almost as tender with him as Florence, pleading to her own false heart the fact of his illness as his excuse. There was something of the pallor of the sick-room left with him — a slight tenuity in his hands and brightness in his eye which did him yeoman's service. Had he been quite robust, Cecilia might have felt that she could not justify to herself the peculiar softness of her words. After the first quarter of an hour he was supremely happy. His awkwardness had gone, and as he sat with his arm round Florence's waist, he found that the little pencil-case had again been attached to her chain, and as he looked down upon her he saw that the cheap brooch was again on her breast. It would have been pretty, could an observer have been there, to see the skill with which they both steered clear of any word or phrase which could be disagreeable to him. One might have thought that it would have been impossible to avoid all touch of a rebuke. The very fact that he was forgiven would seem to imply some fault that required pardon. But there was no hint at any fault. The tact of women excels the skill of men and so perfect was the tact of these, that not a word was said which wounded Harry's ear. He had come again into their fold, and they were rejoiced and showed their joy. He who had gone

astray had repented, and they were beautifully tender to the repentant sheep.

Harry staid a little too long with his love — a little longer, at least, than had been computed, and, in consequence, met Theodore Burton in the Crescent as he was leaving it. This meeting could hardly be made without something of pain, and perhaps it was well for Harry that he should have such an opportunity as this for getting over it quickly. But when he saw Mr. Burton under the bright gas-lamp, he would very willingly have avoided him, had it been possible.

"Well, Harry," said Burton, giving his hand to the repentant sheep.

"How are you, Burton?" said Harry, trying to speak with an unconcerned voice. Then, in answer to an inquiry as to his health, he told of his own illness, speaking of that confounded fever having made him very low. He intended no deceit, but he made more of the fever than was necessary.

"When will you come back to the shop?" Burton asked. It must be remembered that, though the brother could not refuse to welcome back to his home his sister's lover, still he thought that the engagement was a misfortune. He did not believe in Harry as a man of business, and had almost rejoiced when Florence had been so nearly quit of him. And now there was a taint of sarcasm in his voice as he asked as to Harry's return to the chambers in the Adelphi.

"I can hardly quite say as yet," said Harry, still pleading his illness. "They were very much against my coming up to London so soon. Indeed, I should not have done it had I not felt so very — very anxious to see Florence. I don't know, Burton, whether I ought to say anything to you about that."

"I suppose you have said what you had to say to the women."

"Oh yes. I think they understand me completely, and I hope that I understand them."

"In that case, I don't know that you need say anything to me. Come to the Adelphi as soon as you can — that's all. I never think myself that a man becomes a bit stronger after an illness by remaining idle." Then Harry passed on, and felt that he had escaped easily in that interview.

But as he walked home he was compelled to think of the step which he must next take. When he had last seen Lady Ongar he had left her with a promise that Florence was to be deserted for her sake. As yet that promise would by her be supposed to be binding. Indeed, he had thought it to be binding on himself till he had found himself under his mother's influence at the parsonage. During his last few weeks in London he had endured an agony of doubt, but in his vacillations the pendulum had always veered more strongly toward Bolton Street than

to Onslow Crescent. Now the swinging of the pendulum had ceased altogether. From henceforth Bolton Street must be forbidden ground to him, and the sheepfold in Onslow Crescent must be his home till he should have established a small peculiar fold for himself. But, as yet, he had still before him the task of communicating his final decision to the lady in Bolton Street. As he walked home he determined that he had better do so in the first place by letter, and so eager was he as to the propriety of doing this at once, that on his return to his lodgings he sat down and wrote the letter before he went to his bed. It was not very easily written. Here, at any rate, he had to make those confessions of which I have before spoken — confessions which it may be less difficult to make with pen and ink than with spoken words, but which, when so made, are more degrading. The word that is written is a thing capable of permanent life, and lives frequently to the confusion of its parent. A man should make his confessions always by word of mouth, if it be possible. Whether such a course would have been possible to Harry Clavering may be doubtful. It might have been that in a personal meeting the necessary confession would not have got itself adequately spoken. Thinking, perhaps, of this, he wrote his letter as follows on that night:

BLOOMSBURY SQUARE, July, 186—

The date was easily written, but how was he to go on after that? In what form of affection or indifference was he to address her whom he had at that last meeting called his own, his dearest Julia? He got out of his difficulty ill the way common to ladies and gentlemen under such stress, and did not address her by any name or any epithet. The date he allowed to remain, and then he went away at once to the matter of his subject.

I feel that I owe it you at once to tell you what has been my history during the last few weeks. I came up from Clavering today, and have since that been with Mrs. and Miss Burton. Immediately on my return from them I sit down to write you.

After having said so much, Harry probably felt that the rest of his letter would be surplusage. Those few words would tell her all that it was required that she should know. But courtesy demanded that he should say more, and he went on with his confession.

You know that I became engaged to Miss Burton soon after your own marriage. I feel now that I should have told you this when we first met; but yet, had I done so, it would have seemed as though I told it with a special object. I don't know whether I make myself understood in this. I can only hope that I do so.

Understood! Of course she understood it all. She required no blundering explanation from him to assist her intelligence.

I wish now that I had mentioned it. It would have been better for both of us. I should have been saved much pain, and you, perhaps, some uneasiness.

I was called down to Clavering a few weeks ago about some business in the family, and then became ill, so that I was confined to my bed instead of returning to town. Had it not been for this I should not have left you so long in suspense — that is, if there has been suspense. For myself, I have to own that I have been very weak — worse than weak, I fear you will think. I do not know whether your old regard for me will prompt you to make any excuse for me, but I am well sure that I can make none for myself which will not have suggested itself to you without my urging it. If you choose to think that I have been heartless — or, rather, if you are able so to think of me, no words of mine, written or spoken now, will remove that impression from your mind.

I believe that I need write nothing further. You will understand from what I have said all that I should have to say were I to refer at length to that which has passed between us. All that is over now, and it only remains for me to express a hope that you may be happy. Whether we shall ever see each other again, who shall say? but if we do I trust that we may not meet as enemies. May God bless you here and hereafter.

HARRY CLAVERING

When the letter was finished, Harry sat for a while by his open window looking at the moon, over the chimney-pots of his square, and thinking of his career in life as it had hitherto been fulfilled. The great promise of his earlier days had not been kept. His plight in the world was now poor enough, though his hopes had been so high. He was engaged to be married, but had no income on which to marry. He had narrowly escaped great wealth. Ah! it was hard for him to think of that without a regret; but he did strive so to think of it. Though he told himself that it would have been evil for him to have depended on money which had been procured by the very act which had been to him an

injury — to have dressed himself in the feathers which had been plucked from Lord Ongar's wings — it was hard for him to think of all he had missed, and rejoice thoroughly that he had missed it. But he told himself that he so rejoiced, and endeavored to be glad that he had not soiled his hands with riches which never would have belonged to the woman he had loved had she not earned them by being false to him. Early on the following morning he sent off his letter, and then, putting himself into a cab, bowled down to Onslow Crescent. The sheepfold was now very pleasant to him when the head shepherd was away, and so much gratification it was natural that he should allow himself.

That evening, when he came from his club, he found a note from Lady Ongar. It was very short, and the blood rushed to his face as he felt ashamed at seeing with how much apparent ease she had answered him. He had written with difficulty, and had written awkwardly. But there was nothing awkward in her words:

DEAR HARRY: —

We are quits now. I do not know why we should ever meet as enemies. I shall never feel myself to be an enemy of yours. I think it would be well that we should see each other, and, if you have no objection to seeing me, I will be at home any evening that you may call. Indeed, I am at home always in the evening. Surely, Harry, there can be no reason why we should not meet. You need not fear that there will be danger in it.

Will you give my compliments to Miss Florence Burton, with my best wishes for her happiness? Your Mrs. Burton I have seen — as you may have heard, and I congratulate you on your friend.

Yours always, J. O.

The writing of this letter seemed to have been easy enough, and certainly there was nothing in it that was awkward; but I think that the writer had suffered more in the writing than Harry had done in producing his longer epistle. But she had known how to hide her suffering, and had used a tone which told no tale of her wounds. We are quits now, she had said, and she had repeated the words over and over again to herself as she walked up and down her room. Yes, they were quits now, if the reflection of that fact could do her any good. She had ill-treated him in her early days; but, as she had told herself so often, she had served him rather than injured him by that ill-treatment. She had been false to him; but her falsehood had preserved him from a lot which could not have been fortunate. With such a clog as she would have been round his neck — with such a wife, without a shilling of

fortune, how could he have risen in the world? No! Though she had deceived him, she had served him. Then, after that, had come the tragedy of her life, the terrible days in thinking of which she still shuddered, the days of her husband and Sophie Gordeloup — that terrible deathbed, those attacks upon her honor, misery upon misery, as to which she never now spoke a word to anyone, and as to which she was resolved she never would speak again. She had sold herself for money, and had got the price, but the punishment of her offence had been very heavy. And now, in these latter days, she had thought to compensate the man she had loved for the treachery with which she had used him. That treachery had been serviceable to him, but not the less should the compensation be very rich. And she would love him too. Ah! yes, she had always loved him. He should have it all now — everything, if only he would consent to forget that terrible episode in her life, as she would strive to forget it. All that should remain to remind them of Lord Ongar would be the wealth that should henceforth belong to Harry Clavering. Such had been her dream, and Harry had come to her with words of love which made it seem to be a reality. He had spoken to her words of love which he was now forced to withdraw, and the dream was dissipated. It was not to be allowed to her to escape her penalty so easily as that! As for him, they were now quits. That being the case, there could be no reason why they should quarrel.

But what now should she do with her wealth, and especially how should she act in respect to that place down in the country? Though she had learned to hate Ongar Park during her solitary visit there, she had still looked forward to the pleasure the property might give her when she should be able to bestow it upon Harry Clavering. But that had been part of her dream, and the dream was now over. Through it all she had been conscious that she might hardly dare to hope that the end of her punishment should come so soon — and now she knew that it was not come. As far as she could see, there was no end to the punishment in prospect for her. From her first meeting with Harry Clavering on the platform of the railway station, his presence, or her thoughts of him, had sufficed to give some brightness to her life — had enabled her to support the friendship of Sophie Gordeloup, and also to support her solitude when poor Sophie had been banished. But now she was left without any resource. As she sat alone, meditating on all this, she endeavored to console herself with the repetition that, after all, she was the one whom Harry loved — whom Harry would have chosen had he been free to choose. But the comfort to be derived from that was very poor. Yes, he had loved her once — nay, perhaps he loved her still. But when that love was her own she had rejected it. She had rejected

it, simply declaring to him, to her friends, and to the world at large, that she preferred to be rich. She had her reward, and, bowing her head upon her hands, she acknowledged that the punishment was deserved.

Her first step after writing her note to Harry was to send for Mr. Turnbull, her lawyer. She had expected to see Harry on the evening of the day on which she had written, but instead of that she received a note from him in which he said that he would come to her before long. Mr. Turnbull was more instant in obeying her commands, and was with her on the morning after he received her injunction. He was almost a perfect stranger to her, having only seen her once, and that for a few moments after her return to England. Her marriage settlements had been prepared for her by Sir Hugh's attorney; but during her sojourn in Florence it had become necessary that she should have someone in London to look after her own affairs, and Mr. Turnbull had been recommended to her by lawyers employed by her husband. He was a prudent, sensible man, who recognized it to be his imperative interest to look after his client's interest. And he had done his duty by Lady Ongar in that trying time immediately after her return. An offer had then been made by the Courton family to give Julia her income without opposition if she would surrender Ongar Park. To this she had made objections with indignation, and Mr. Turnbull, though he had at first thought that she would be wise to comply with the terms proposed, had done her work for her with satisfactory expedition. Since those days she had not seen him, but now she had summoned him, and he was with her in Bolton Street.

"I want to speak to you, Mr. Turnbull," she said, "about that place down in Surrey. I don't like it."

"Not like Ongar Park?" he said, "I have always heard that it is so charming."

"It is not charming to me. It is a sort of property that I don't want, and I mean to give it up."

"Lord Ongar's uncles would buy your interest in it, I have no doubt."

"Exactly. They have sent to me, offering to do so. My brother-in-law, Sir Hugh Clavering, called on me with a message from them saying so. I thought that he was very foolish to come, and so I told him. Such things should be done by one's lawyers. Don't you think so, Mr. Turnbull?" Mr. Turnbull smiled as he declared that, of course, he, being a lawyer, was of that opinion. "I am afraid they will have thought me uncivil," continued Julia, "as I spoke rather brusquely to Sir Hugh Clavering. I am not inclined to take any steps through Sir Hugh Clavering, but I do not know that I have any reason to be angry with the little lord's family."

"Really, Lady Ongar, I think not. When your ladyship returned there was some opposition thought of for a while, but I really do not think it was their fault."

"No, it was not their fault."

"That was my feeling at the time; it was, indeed."

"It was the fault of Lord Ongar — of my husband. As regards all the Courtons, I have no word of complaint to make. It is not to be expected — it is not desirable that they and I should be friends. It is impossible, after what has passed, that there should be such friendship. But they have never injured me, and I wish to oblige them. Had Ongar Park suited me, I should doubtless have kept it; but it does not suit me, and they are welcome to have it back again."

"Has a price been named, Lady Ongar?"

"No price need be named. There is to be no question of a price. Lord Ongar's mother is welcome to the place — or rather to such interest as I have in it."

"And to pay a rent?" suggested Mr. Turnbull.

"To pay no rent. Nothing would induce me to let the place, or to sell my right in it. I will have no bargain about it. But as nothing also will induce me to live there, I am not such a dog in the manger as to wish to keep it. If you will have the kindness to see Mr. Courton's lawyer, and to make arrangements about it."

"But, Lady Ongar, what you call your right in the estate is worth over twenty thousand pounds — it is, indeed. You could borrow twenty thousand pounds on the security of it tomorrow."

"But I don't want to borrow twenty thousand pounds."

"No, no, exactly — of course you don't. But I point out that fact to show the value. You would be making a present of that sum of money to people who do not want it — who have no claim upon you. I really don't see how they could take it."

"Mrs. Courton wishes to have the place very much."

"But, my lady, she has never thought of getting it without paying for it. Lady Ongar, I really can not advise you to take any such step as that — indeed, I can not. I should be wrong, as your lawyer, if I did not point out to you that such a proceeding would be quite romantic — quite so — what the world would call Quixotic. People don't expect such things as that — they don't, indeed."

"People don't often have such reasons as I have," said Lady Ongar. Mr. Turnbull sat silent for a while, looking as though he were unhappy. The proposition made to him was one which, as a lawyer, he felt to be very distasteful to him. He knew that his client had no male friends in whom she confided, and he felt that the world would blame him if he

allowed this lady to part with her property in the way she had suggested. "You will find that I am in earnest," she continued, smiling, "and you may as well give way to my vagaries with a good grace."

"They would not take it, Lady Ongar."

"At any rate, we can try them. If you will make them understand that I don't at all want the place, and that it will go to rack and ruin because there is no one to live there, I am sure they will take it."

Then Mr. Turnbull again sat silent and unhappy, thinking with what words he might best bring forward his last and strongest argument against this rash proceeding.

"Lady Ongar," he said, "in your peculiar position, there are double reasons why you should not act in this way."

"What do you mean, Mr. Turnbull? What is my peculiar position?"

"The world will say that you have restored Ongar Park because you were afraid to keep it. Indeed, Lady Ongar, you had better let it remain as it is."

"I care nothing for what the world says," she exclaimed, rising quickly from her chair — "nothing, nothing!"

"You should really hold by your rights — you should, indeed. Who can possibly say what other interests may be concerned? You may marry, and live for the next fifty years, and have a family. It is my duty, Lady Ongar, to point out these things to you."

"I am sure you are quite right, Mr. Turnbull," she said, struggling to maintain a quiet demeanor. "You, of course, are only doing your duty. But whether I marry or whether I remain as I am, I shall give up this place. And as for what the world, as you call it, may say, I will not deny that I cared much for that on my immediate return. What people said then made me very unhappy. But I care nothing for it now. I have established my rights, and that has been sufficient. To me it seems that the world, as you call it, has been civil enough in its usage of me lately. It is only of those who should have been my friends that I have a right to complain. If you will please to do this thing for me, I will be obliged to you."

"If you are quite determined about it —"

"I am quite determined. What is the use of the place to me? I never shall go there. What is the use even of the money that comes to me? I have no purpose for it. I have nothing to do with it."

There was something in her tone as she said this which well filled him with pity.

"You should remember," he said, "how short a time it is since you became a widow. Things will be different with you soon."

"My clothes will be different, if you mean that," she answered, "but I do not know that there will be any other change in me. But I am wrong to trouble you with all this. If you will let Mr. Courton's lawyer know, with my compliments to Mrs. Courton, that I have heard that she would like to have the place, and that I do not want it, I will be obliged to you." Mr. Turnbull having by this time perceived that she was quite in earnest, took his leave, having promised to do her bidding.

In this interview she had told her lawyer only a part of the plan which was now running in her head. As for giving up Ongar Park, she took to herself no merit for that. The place had been odious to her ever since she had endeavored to establish herself there, and had found that the clergyman's wife would not speak to her — that even her own house-keeper would hardly condescend to hold converse with her. She felt that she would be a dog in the manger to keep the place in her possession. But she had thoughts beyond this — resolutions only as yet half formed as to a wider surrender. She had disgraced herself, ruined herself; robbed herself of all happiness by the marriage she had made. Her misery had not been simply the misery of that lord's lifetime. As might have been expected, that was soon over. But an enduring wretchedness had come after that from which she saw no prospect of escape. What was to be her future life, left as she was and would be, in desolation? If she were to give it all up — all the wealth that had been so ill-gotten — might there not then be some hope of comfort for her?

She had been willing enough to keep Lord Ongar's money, and use it for the purposes of her own comfort, while she had still hoped that comfort might come from it. The remembrance of all that she had to give had been very pleasant to her, as long as she had hoped that Harry Clavering would receive it at her hands. She had not at once felt that the fruit had all turned to ashes. But now — now that Harry was gone from her — now that she had no friend left to her whom she could hope to make happy by her munificence, the very knowledge of her wealth was a burden to her. And as she thought of her riches in these first days of her desertion, as she had indeed been thinking since Cecilia Burton had been with her, she came to understand that she was degraded by their acquisition. She had done that which had been unpardonably bad, and she felt like Judas when he stood with the price of his treachery in his hand. He had given up his money, and would not she do as much? There had been a moment in which she had nearly declared all her purpose to the lawyer, but she was held back by the feeling that she ought to make her plans certain before she communicated them to him.

She must live. She could not go out and hang herself as Judas had done. And then there was her title and rank, of which she did not know

whether it was within her power to divest herself. She sorely felt the want of someone from whom in her present need she might ask counsel; of some friend to whom she could trust to tell her in what way she might now best atone for the evil she had done. Plans ran through her head which were thrown aside almost as soon as made, because she saw that they were impracticable. She even longed in these days for her sister's aid, though of old she had thought but little of Hermy as a counselor. She had no friend whom she might ask — unless she might still ask Harry Clavering.

If she did not keep it all, might she still keep something — enough for decent life — and yet comfort herself with the feeling that she had expiated her sin? And what would be said of her when she had made this great surrender? Would not the world laugh at her instead of praising her — that world as to which she had assured Mr. Turnbull that she did not care what its verdict about her might be? She had many doubts. Ah! why had not Harry Clavering remained true to her? But her punishment had come upon her with all its severity, and she acknowledged to herself now that it was not to be avoided.

Chapter XLVIII

Lady Ongar's Revenge

At last came the night which Harry had fixed for his visit to Bolton Street. He had looked forward certainly with no pleasure to the interview, and, now that the time for it had come, was disposed to think that Lady Ongar had been unwise in asking for it. But he had promised that he would go, and there was no possible escape.

He dined that evening in Onslow Crescent, where he was now again established with all his old comfort. He had again gone up to the children's nursery with Cecilia, had kissed them all in their cots, and made himself quite at home in the establishment. It was with them there

as though there had been no dreadful dream about Lady Ongar. It was so altogether with Cecilia and Florence, and even Mr. Burton was allowing himself to be brought round to a charitable view of Harry's character. Harry on this day had gone to the chambers in the Adelphi for an hour, and, walking away with Theodore Burton, had declared his intention of working like a horse. "If you were to say like a man, it would perhaps be better," said Burton. "I must leave you to say that," answered Harry; "for the present I will content myself with the horse." Burton was willing to hope, and allowed himself once more to fill into his old pleasant way of talking about the business, as though there were no other subject under the sun so full of manifold interest. He was very keen at the present moment about Metropolitan railways, and was ridiculing the folly of those who feared that the railway projectors were going too fast. "But we shall never get any thanks," he said. "When the thing has been done, and thanks are over due, people will look upon all our work so much as a matter of course that it will never occur to them to think that they owe us anything. They will have forgotten all their cautions, and will take what they get as though it were simply their due. Nothing astonishes me so much as the fear people feel before a thing is done when I join it with their want of surprise or admiration afterward." In this way even Theodore Burton had resumed his terms of intimacy with Harry Clavering.

Harry had told both Cecilia and Florence of his intended visit to Bolton Street, and they had all become very confidential on the subject. In most such cases, we may suppose that a man does not say much to one woman of the love which another woman has acknowledged for himself. Nor was Harry Clavering at all disposed to make any such boast. But in this case, Lady Ongar herself had told everything to Mrs. Burton. She had declared her passion, and had declared also her intention of making Harry her husband if he would take her. Everything was known, and there was no possibility of sparing Lady Ongar's name.

"If I had been her, I would not have asked for such a meeting," Cecilia said. The three were at this time sitting together, for Mr. Burton rarely joined them in their conversation.

"I don't know," said Florence. "I do not see why she and Harry should not remain as friends."

"They might be friends without meeting now," said Cecilia.

"Hardly. If the awkwardness were not got over at once, it would never be got over. I almost think she is right, though if I was her I should long to have it over." That was Florence's judgment in the matter. Harry sat between them, like a sheep as he was, very meekly — not without some enjoyment of his sheepdom, but still feeling that he was a sheep.

At half-past eight he started up, having already been told that a cab was waiting for him at the door. He pressed Cecilia's hand as he went, indicating his feeling that he had before him an affair of some magnitude, and then, of course, had a word or two to say to Florence in private on the landing. Oh, those delicious private words, the need for which comes so often during those short halcyon days of one's lifetime! They were so pleasant that Harry would fain have returned to repeat them after he was seated in his cab; but the inevitable wheels carried him onward with cruel velocity, and he was in Bolton Street before the minutes had sufficed for him to collect his thoughts.

Lady Ongar, when he entered the room, was sitting in her accustomed chair, near a little work-table which she always used, and did not rise to meet him. It was a pretty chair, soft and easy, made with a back for lounging, but with no arms to impede the circles of a lady's hoops. Harry knew the chair well, and had spoken of its graceful comfort in some of his visits to Bolton Street. She was seated there when he entered; and though he was not sufficiently experienced in the secrets of feminine attire to know at once that she had dressed herself with care, he did perceive that she was very charming, not only by force of her own beauty, but by the aid also of her dress. And yet she was in deep mourning — in the deepest mourning; nor was there anything about her of which complaint might fairly be made by those who do complain on such subjects. Her dress was high round her neck, and the cap on her head was indisputably a widow's cap; but enough of her brown hair was to be seen to tell of its rich loveliness; and the black dress was so made as to show the full perfection of her form; and with it all there was that graceful feminine brightness that care and money can always give, and which will not come without care and money. It might be well, she had thought, to surrender her income, and become poor and dowdy hereafter, but there could be no reason why Harry Clavering should not be made to know all that he had lost.

"Well, Harry," she said, as he stepped up to her and took her offered hand, "I am glad that you have come that I may congratulate you. Better late than never, eh, Harry?"

How was he to answer her when she spoke to him in this strain? "I hope it is not too late," he said, hardly knowing what the words were which were coming from his mouth.

"Nay, that is for you to say. I can do it heartily, Harry, if you mean that. And why not? Why should I not wish you happy? I have always liked you — have always wished for your happiness. You believe that I am sincere when I congratulate you, do you not?"

"Oh yes, you are always sincere."

"I have always been so to you. As to any sincerity beyond that, we need say nothing now. I have always been your good friend — to the best of my ability. Ah! Harry, you do not know how much I have thought of your welfare — how much I do think of it. But never mind that. Tell me something now of this Florence Burton of yours. Is she tall?" I believe that Lady Ongar, when she asked this question, knew well that Florence was short of stature.

"No, she is not tall," said Harry.

"What — a little beauty? Upon the whole, I think I agree with your taste. The most lovely women that I have ever seen have been small, bright, and perfect in their proportions. It is very rare that a tall woman has a perfect figure." Julie's own figure was quite perfect. "Do you remember Constance Vane? Nothing ever exceeded her beauty." Now Constance Vane — she, at least, who had in those days been Constance Vane, but who now was the stout mother of two or three children — had been a waxen doll of a girl, whom Harry had known, but had neither liked nor admired. But she was highly bred, and belonged to the cream of English fashion; she had possessed a complexion as pure in its tints as are the interior leaves of a blush rose, and she had never had a thought in her head, and hardly ever a word on her lips. She and Florence Burton were as poles asunder in their differences. Harry felt this at once, and had an indistinct notion that Lady Ongar was as well aware of the fact as was he himself. "She is not a bit like Constance Vane," he said.

"Then what is she like? If she is more beautiful than what Miss Vane used to be, she must be lovely indeed."

"She has no pretensions of that kind," said Harry, almost sulkily.

"I have heard that she was so very beautiful!" Lady Ongar had never heard a word about Florence's beauty — not a word. She knew nothing personally of Florence beyond what Mrs. Burton had told her. But who will not forgive her the little deceit that was necessary to her little revenge?

"I don't know how to describe her," said Harry. "I hope the time may soon come when you will see her, and be able to judge for yourself."

"I hope so too. It shall not be my fault if I do not like her."

"I do not think you can fail to like her. She is very clever, and that will go further with you than mere beauty. Not but what I think her very — very pretty."

"Ah! I understand. She reads a great deal, and that sort of thing. Yes, that is very nice. But I shouldn't have thought that that would have taken you. You used not to care much for talent and learning — not in women, I mean."

"I don't know about that," said Harry, looking very foolish.

"But a contrast is what you men always like. Of course I ought not to say that, but you will know of what I am thinking. A clever, highly-educated woman like Miss Burton will be a much better companion to you than I could have been. You see I am very frank, Harry." She wished to make him talk freely about himself; his future days, and his past days, while he was simply anxious to say on these subjects as little as possible. Poor woman! The excitement of having a passion which she might indulge was over with her — at any rate, for the present. She had played her game and had lost woefully; but before she retired altogether from the gaming-table she could not keep herself from longing for a last throw of the dice.

"These things, I fear, go very much by chance," said Harry.

"You do not mean me to suppose that you are taking Miss Burton by chance. That would be as uncomplimentary to her as to yourself."

"Chance, at any rate, has been very good to me in this instance."

"Of that I am sure. Do not suppose that I am doubting that. It is not only the paradise that you have gained, but the pandemonium that you have escaped!" Then she laughed slightly, but the laughter was uneasy, and made her angry with herself. She had especially determined to be at ease during this meeting, and was conscious that any falling off in that respect on her part would put into his hands the power which she was desirous of exercising.

"You are determined to rebuke me, I see," said he. "If you choose to do so, I am prepared to bear it. My defense, if I have a defense, is one that I can not use."

"And what would be your defense?"

"I have said that I can not use it!"

"As if I did not understand it all! What you mean to say is this — that when your good stars sent you in the way of Florence Burton, you had been ill treated by her who would have made your pandemonium for you, and that she therefore — she who came first, and behaved so badly, can have no right to find fault with you in that you have obeyed your good stars and done so well for yourself. That is what you call your defense. It would be perfect, Harry, perfect, if you had only whispered to me a word of Miss Burton when I first saw you after my return home. It is odd to me that you should not have written to me and told me when I was abroad with my husband. It would have comforted me to have known that the wound which I had given had been cured — that is, if there was a wound."

"You know that there was a wound."

"At any rate, it was not mortal. But when are such wounds mortal? When are they more than skin-deep?"

"I can say nothing as to that now."

"No, Harry, of course you can say nothing. Why should you be made to say anything? You are fortunate and happy, and have all that you want. I have nothing that I want."

There was a reality in the tone of sorrow in which this was spoken which melted him at once, and the more so in that there was so much in her grief which could not but be flattering to his vanity. "Do not say that, Lady Ongar," he exclaimed.

"But I do say it. What have I got in the world that is worth having? My possessions are ever so many thousands a year — and a damaged name."

"I deny that. I deny it altogether. I do not think that there is one who knows of your story who believes ill of you."

"I could tell you of one, Harry, who thinks very ill of me — nay, of two; and they are both in this room. Do you remember how you used to teach me that terribly conceited bit of Latin — Nil conscire sibi? Do you suppose that I can boast that I never grow pale as I think of my own fault? I am thinking of it always, and my heart is ever becoming paler and paler. And as to the treatment of others — I wish I could make you know what I suffered when I was fool enough to go to that place in Surrey. The coachman who drives me no doubt thinks that I poisoned my husband, and the servant who let you in just now supposes me to be an abandoned woman because you are here."

"You will be angry with me, perhaps, if I say that these feelings are morbid and will die away. They show the weakness which has come from the ill usage you have suffered."

"You are right in part, no doubt. I shall become hardened to it all, and shall fall into some endurable mode of life in time. But I can look forward to nothing. What future have I? Was there ever anyone so utterly friendless as I am? Your kind cousin has done that for me; and yet he came here to me the other day, smiling and talking as though he were sure that I should be delighted by his condescension. I do not think that he will ever come again."

"I did not know you had seen him."

"Yes; I saw him, but I did not find much relief from his visit. We won't mind that, however. We can talk about something better than Hugh Clavering during the few minutes that we have together — can we not? And so Miss Burton is very learned and very clever?"

"I did not quite say that."

"But I know she is. What a comfort that will be to you! I am not clever, and I never should have become learned. Oh dear! I had but one merit, Harry — I was fond of you."

"And how did you show it?" He did not speak these words, because he would not triumph over her, nor was he willing to express that regret on his own part which these words would have implied; but it was impossible for him to avoid a thought of them. He remained silent, therefore, taking up some toy from the table into his hands, as though that would occupy his attention.

"But what a fool I am talk of it — am I not? And I am worse than a fool. I was thinking of you when I stood up in church to be married — thinking of that offer of your little savings. I used to think of you at every harsh word that I endured — of your modes of life when I sat through those terrible nights by that poor creature's bed — of you when I knew that the last day was coming. I thought of you always, Harry, when I counted up my gains. I never count them up now. Ah! how I thought of you when I came to this house in the carriage which you had provided for me, when I had left you at the station almost without speaking a word to you! I should have been more gracious had I not had you in my thoughts throughout my whole journey home from Florence. And after that I had some comfort in believing that the price of my shame might make you rich without shame. Oh, Harry, I have been disappointed! You will never understand what I felt when first that evil woman told me of Miss Burton."

"Oh, Julia, what am I to say?"

"You can say nothing; but I wonder that you had not told me."

"How could I tell you? Would it not have seemed that I was vain enough to have thought of putting you on your guard?"

"And why not? But never mind. Do not suppose that I am rebuking you. As I said in my letter, we are quits now, and there is no place for scolding on either side. We are quits now; but I am punished and you are rewarded."

Of course he could not answer this. Of course he was hard pressed for words. Of course he could neither acknowledge that he had been rewarded, nor assert that a share of the punishment of which she spoke had fallen upon him also. This was the revenge with which she had intended to attack him. That she should think that he had in truth been punished and not rewarded, was very natural. Had he been less quick in forgetting her after her marriages he would have had his reward without any punishment. If such were her thoughts who shall quarrel with her on that account?

"I have been very frank with you," she continued. "Indeed, why should I not be so? People talk of a lady's secret, but my secret has been no secret from you? That I was made to tell it under — under — what I will call an error, was your fault, and it is that that has made us quits."

"I know that I have behaved badly to you."

"But then, unfortunately, you know also that I had deserved bad treatment. Well, we will say no more about it. I have been very candid with you, but then I have injured no one by my candor. You have not said a word to me in reply; but then your tongue is tied by your duty to Miss Burton — your duty and your love together, of course. It is all as it should be, and now I will have done. When are you to be married, Harry?"

"No time has been flied. I am a very poor man, you know."

"Alas! alas! yes. When mischief is done, how badly all the things turn out. You are poor and I am rich, and yet we can not help each other."

"I fear not."

"Unless I could adopt Miss Burton, and be a sort of mother to her. You would shrink, however, from any such guardianship on my part. But you are clever, Harry, and can work when you please, and will make your way? If Miss Burton keeps you waiting now by any prudent fear on her part, I shall not think so well of her as I am inclined to do."

"The Burtons are all prudent people."

"Tell her, from me, with my love, not to be too prudent. I thought to be prudent, and see what has come of it."

"I will tell her what you say."

"Do, please; and, Harry, look here. Will she accept a little present from me? You, at any rate, for my sake, will ask her to do so. Give her this — it is only a trifle," and she put her hand on a small jeweler's box which was close to her arm upon the table, "and tell her — of course she knows all our story, Harry?"

"Yes, she knows it all."

"Tell her that she whom you have rejected sends it with her kindest wishes to her whom you have taken."

"No, I will not tell her that."

"Why not? It is all true. I have not poisoned the little ring, as the ladies would have done some centuries since. They were grander then than we are now, and perhaps hardly worse, though more cruel. You will bid her take it, will you not?"

"I am sure she will take it without bidding on my part."

"And tell her not to write me any thanks. She and I will both understand that that had better be omitted. If, when I shall see her at some future time as your wife, it shall be on her finger, I shall know that I am thanked." Then Harry rose to go. "I did not mean by that to turn you out, but perhaps it may be as well. I have no more to say; and as for you, you can not but wish that the penance should be over." Then he pressed her hand, and with some muttered farewell, bade her adieu.

Again she did not rise from her chair, but, nodding at him with a sweet smile, let him go without another word.

Chapter XLIX

Showing What Happened Off Heligoland

During the six weeks after this, Harry Clavering settled down to his work at the chambers in the Adelphi with exemplary diligence. Florence, having remained a fortnight in town after Harry's return to the sheepfold, and having accepted Lady Ongar's present — not without a long and anxious consultation with her sister-in-law on the subject — had returned in fully restored happiness to Stratton. Mrs. Burton was at Ramsgate with the children, and Mr. Burton was in Russia with reference to a line of railway which was being projected from Moscow to Astracan. It was now September, and Harry, in his letters home, declared that he was the only person left in London. It was hard upon him — much harder than it was upon the Wallikers and other young men whom Fate retained in town for Harry was a man given to shooting — a man accustomed to pass the autumnal months in a country house. And then, if things had chanced to go one way instead of another, he would have had his own shooting down at Ongar Park with his own friends — admiring him at his heels; or, if not so this year, he would have been shooting elsewhere with the prospect of these rich joys for years to come. As it was, he had promised to stick to the shop, and was sticking to it manfully. Nor do I think that he allowed his mind to revert to those privileges which might have been his at all more frequently than any of my readers would have done in his place. He was sticking to the shop; and, though he greatly disliked the hot desolation of London in those days, being absolutely afraid to frequent his club at such a period of the year, and though he hated Walliker mortally, he was fully resolved to go on with his work. Who could tell what might be his fate? Perhaps in another ten years he might be carrying that Russian railway on through

the deserts of Siberia. Then there came to him suddenly tidings which disturbed all his resolutions, and changed the whole current of his life.

At first there came a telegram to him from the country, desiring him to go down at once to Clavering, but not giving him any reason. Added to the message were these words: "We are all well at the parsonage" — words evidently added in thoughtfulness. But before he had left the office, there came to him there a young man from the bank at which his cousin Hugh kept his account, telling him the tidings to which the telegram no doubt referred. Jack Stuart's boat had been lost, and his two cousins had gone to their graves beneath the sea! The master of the boat, and Stuart himself, with a boy, had been saved. The other sailors whom they had with them, and the ship's steward, had perished with the Claverings. Stuart, it seemed, had caused tidings of the accident to be sent to the rector of Clavering and to Sir Hugh's bankers. At the bank they had ascertained that their late customer's cousin was in town, and their messenger had thereupon been sent, first to Bloomsbury Square, and from thence to the Adelphi.

Harry had never loved his cousins. The elder he had greatly disliked, and the younger he would have disliked had he not despised him. But not the less on that account was he inexpressibly shocked when he first heard what had happened. The lad said that there could, as he imagined, be no mistake. The message had come, as he believed, from Holland, but of that he was not certain. There could, however, be no doubt about the fact. It distinctly stated that both brothers had perished. Harry had known, when he received the message from home, that no train would take him till three in the afternoon, and had therefore remained at the office; but he could not remain now. His head was confused, and he could hardly bring himself to think how this matter would affect himself. When he attempted to explain his absence to an old serious clerk there, he spoke of his own return to the office as certain. He should be back, he supposed, in a week at the furthest. He was thinking thus of his promises to Theodore Burton, and had not begun to realize the fact that his whole destiny in life would be changed. He said something, with a long face, on the terrible misfortune which had occurred, but gave no hint that that misfortune would be important in its consequences to himself. It was not till he had reached his lodging in Bloomsbury Square that he remembered that his own father was now the baronet, and that he was his father's heir. And then for a moment he thought about the property. He believed that it was entailed, but even of that he was not certain. But if it were unentailed, to whom could his cousin have left it? He endeavored, however, to expel such thoughts from his mind, as though there was something ungenerous in entertain-

ing them. He tried to think of the widow, but even in doing that he could not tell himself that there was much ground for genuine sorrow. No wife had ever had less joy from her husband's society than Lady Clavering had had from that of Sir Hugh. There was no child to mourn the loss — no brother, no unmarried sister. Sir Hugh had had friends — as friendship goes with such men; but Harry could not but doubt whether among them all there would be one who would feel anything like true grief for his loss. And it was the same with Archie. Who in the world would miss Archie Clavering? What man or woman would find the world to be less bright because Archie Clavering was sleeping beneath the waves? Some score of men at his club would talk of poor Clavvy for a few days — would do so without any pretence at the tenderness of sorrow; and then even of Archie's memory there would be an end. Thinking of all this as he was carried down to Clavering, Harry could not but acknowledge that the loss to the world had not been great; but, even while telling himself this, he would not allow himself to take comfort in the prospect of his heirship. Once, perhaps, he did speculate how Florence should bear her honors as Lady Clavering, but this idea he swept away from his thoughts as quickly as he was able.

The tidings had reached the parsonage very late on the previous night — so late that the rector had been disturbed in his bed to receive them. It was his duty to make known to Lady Clavering the fact that she was a widow, but this he could not do till the next morning. But there was little sleep that night for him or for his wife! He knew well enough that the property was entailed. He felt with sufficient strength what it was to become a baronet at a sudden blow, and to become also the owner of the whole Clavering property. He was not slow to think of the removal to the great house, of the altered prospects of his son, and of the mode of life which would be fitting for himself in future. Before the morning came he had meditated who should be the future rector of Clavering, and had made some calculations as to the expediency of resuming his hunting. Not that he was a heartless man, or that he rejoiced at what had happened. But a man's ideas of generosity change as he advances in age, and the rector was old enough to tell himself boldly that this thing that had happened could not be to him a cause of much grief. He had never loved his cousins, or pretended to love them. His cousin's wife he did love, after a fashion, but in speaking to his own wife of the way in which this tragedy would affect Hermione, he did not scruple to speak of her widowhood as a period of coining happiness.

"She will be cut to pieces," said Mrs. Clavering. "She was attached to him as earnestly as though he had treated her always well."

"I believe it; but not the less will she feel her release, unconsciously; and her life, which has been very wretched, will gradually become easy to her."

Even Mrs. Clavering could not deny that this would be so, and then they reverted to matters which more closely concerned themselves. "I suppose Harry will marry at once now?" said the mother.

"No doubt; it is almost a pity, is it not?" The rector — as we still call him — was thinking that Florence was hardly a fitting wife for his son with his altered prospects. Ah! what a grand thing it would have been if the Clavering property and Lady Ongar's jointure could have gone together!

"Not a pity at all," said Mrs. Clavering. "You will find that Florence will make him a very happy man."

"I dare say — I dare say. Only he would hardly have taken her had this sad accident happened before he saw her. But if she will make him happy, that is everything. I have never thought much about money myself. If I find any comfort in these tidings, it is for his sake, not for my own. I would sooner remain as I am." This was not altogether untrue, and yet he was thinking of the big house and the bunting.

"What will be done about the living?" It was early in the morning when Mrs. Clavering asked this question. She had thought much about the living during the night, and so had the rector, but his thoughts had not run in the same direction as hers. He made no immediate answer, and then she went on with her question. "Do you think that you will keep it in your own hands?"

"Well — no; why should I? I am too idle about it as it is. I should be more so under these altered circumstances."

"I am sure you would do your duty if you resolved to keep it, but I don't see why you should do so."

"Clavering is a great deal better than Humbleton," said the rector. Humbleton was the name of the parish held by Mr. Fielding, his son-in-law.

But the idea here put forward did not suit the idea which was running in Mrs. Clavering's mind. "Edward and Mary are very well off," she said. "His own property is considerable, and I don't think they want anything. Besides, he would hardly like to give up a family living."

"I might ask him, at any rate."

"I was thinking of Mr. Saul," said Mrs. Clavering, boldly.

"Of Mr. Saul!" The image of Mr. Saul, as rector of Clavering, perplexed the new baronet egregiously.

"Well — yes. He is an excellent clergyman. No one can deny that." Then there was silence between them for a few moments. "In that case,

he and Fanny would of course marry. It is no good concealing the fact that she is very fond of him."

"Upon my word, I can't understand it," said the rector.

"It is so; and as to the excellence of his character, there can be no doubt." To this the rector made no answer, but went away into his dressing-room, that he might prepare himself for his walk across the park to the great house. While they were discussing who should be the future incumbent of the living, Lady Clavering was still sleeping in unconsciousness of her fate. Mr. Clavering greatly dreaded the task which was before him, and had made a little attempt to induce his wife to take the office upon herself; but she had explained to him that it would be more seemly that he should be the bearer of the tidings. "It would seem that you were wanting in affection for her if you do not go yourself;" his wife had said to him. That the rector of Clavering was master of himself and of his own actions, no one who knew the family ever denied, but the instances in which he declined to follow his wife's advice were not many.

It was about eight o'clock when he went across the park. He had already sent a messenger with a note to beg that Lady Clavering would be up to receive him. As he would come very early, he had said, perhaps she would see him in her own room. The poor lady had, of course, been greatly frightened by this announcement; but this fear had been good for her, as they had well understood at the rectory; the blow, dreadfully sudden as it must still be, would be somewhat less sudden under this preparation. When Mr. Clavering reached the house the servant was in waiting to show him up stairs to the sitting room which Lady Clavering usually occupied when alone. She had been there waiting for him for the last half hour. "Mr. Clavering, what is it?" she exclaimed, as he entered with tidings of death written on his visage. "In the name of heaven, what is it? You have something to tell me of Hugh."

"Dear Hermione," he said, taking her by the hand.

"What is it? Tell me at once. Is he still alive?"

The rector still held her by the hand, but spoke no word. He had been trying as he came across the park to arrange the words in which he should tell his tale, but now it was told without any speech on his part.

"He is dead. Why do you not speak? Why are you so cruel?"

"Dearest Hermione, what am I to say to comfort you?"

What he might say after this was of little moment, for she had fainted. He rang the bell, and then, when the servants were there — the old housekeeper and Lady Clavering's maid — he told to them, rather than to her, what had been their master's fate.

"And Captain Archie?" asked the housekeeper.

The rector shook his head, and the housekeeper knew that the rector was now the baronet. Then they took the poor widow to her own room — should I not rather call her, as I may venture to speak the truth, the enfranchised slave than the poor widow — and the rector, taking up his hat, promised that he would send his wife across to their mistress. His morning's task had been painful, but it had been easily accomplished. As he walked home among the oaks of Clavering Park, he told himself; no doubt, that they were now all his own.

That day at the rectory was very somber, if it was not actually sad. The greater part of the morning Mrs. Clavering passed with the widow, and, sitting near her sofa, she wrote sundry letters to those who were connected with the family. The longest of these was to Lady Ongar, who was now at Tenby, and in that there was a pressing request from Hermione that her sister would come to her at Clavering Park: "Tell her," said Lady Clavering, "that all her anger must be over now." But Mrs. Clavering said nothing of Julia's anger. She merely urged the request that Julia would come to her sister. "She will be sure to come," said Mrs. Clavering. "You need have no fear on that head."

"But how can I invite her here, when the house is not my own?"

"Pray do not talk in that way, Hermione. The house will be your own for any time that you may want it. Your husband's relations are your dear friends, are they not?" But this allusion to her husband brought her to another fit of hysterical tears. "Both of them gone," she said, "both of them gone!" Mrs. Clavering knew well that she was not alluding to the two brothers, but to her husband and her baby. Of poor Archie no one had said a word — beyond that one word spoken by the housekeeper. For her, it had been necessary that she should know who was now the master of Clavering Park.

Twice in the day Mrs. Clavering went over to the big house, and on her second return, late in the evening, she found her son. When she arrived, there had already been some few words on the subject between him and his father.

"You have heard of it, Harry?"

"Yes; a clerk came to me from the banker's."

"Dreadful, is it not? Quite terrible to think of!"

"Indeed it is, sir. I was never so shocked in my life."

"He would go in that cursed boat, though I know that he was advised against it," said the father, holding up his hands and shaking his head.

"And now both of them gone — both gone at once!"

"How does she bear it?"

"Your mother is with her now. When I went in the morning — I had written a line, and she expected bad news — she fainted. Of course, I could do nothing. I can hardly say that I told her. She asked the question, and then saw by my face that her fears were well founded. Upon my word, I was glad when she did faint; it was the best thing for her."

"It must have been very painful for you."

"Terrible — terrible;" and the rector shook his head. "It will make a great difference in your prospects, Harry."

"And in your life, sir! So to say, you are as young a man as myself."

"Am I? I believe I was about as young when you were born. But I don't think at all about myself in this matter. I am too old to care to change my manner of living. It won't affect me very much. Indeed, I hardly know yet how it may affect me. Your mother thinks I ought to give up the living. If you were in orders, Harry —"

"I'm very glad, sir, that I am not."

"I suppose so. And there is no need — certainly there is no need. You will be able to do pretty nearly what you like about the property. I shall not care to interfere."

"Yes you will, sir. It feels strange now, but you will soon get used to it. I wonder whether he left a will."

"It can't make any difference to you, you know. Every acre of the property is entailed. She has her settlement. Eight hundred a year, I think it is. She'll not be a rich woman like her sister. I wonder where she'll live. As far as that goes, she might stay at the house, if she likes it. I'm sure your mother wouldn't object."

Harry on this occasion asked no questions about the living, but he also had thought of that. He knew well that his mother would befriend Mr. Saul. and he knew also that his father would ultimately take his mother's advice. As regarded himself he had no personal objection to Mr. Saul, though he could not understand how his sister should feel any strong regard for such a man.

Edward Fielding would make a better neighbor at the parsonage, and then he thought whether an exchange might not be made. After that, and before his mother's return from the great house, he took a stroll through the park with Fanny. Fanny altogether declined to discuss any of the family prospects as they were affected by the accident which had happened. To her mind the tragedy was so terrible that she could only feel its tragic element. No doubt she had her own thoughts about Mr. Saul as connected with it. "What would he think of this sudden death of the two brothers? How would he feel it. If she could be allowed to talk to him on the matter, what would he say of their fate here and hereafter? Would he go to the great house to offer the consolations of

religion to the widow?" Of all this she thought much; but no picture of Mr. Saul as rector of Clavering, or of herself as mistress in her mother's house, presented itself to her mind. Harry found her to be a dull companion, and he, perhaps, consoled himself with some personal attention to the oak trees, which loomed larger upon him now than they had ever done before.

On the third day the rector went up to London, leaving Harry at the parsonage. It was necessary that lawyers should be visited, and that such facts as to the loss should be proved as were capable of proof. There was no doubt at all as to the fate of Sir Hugh and his brother. The escape of Mr. Stuart and of two of those employed by him prevented the possibility of a doubt. The vessel had been caught in a gale off Heligoland, and had foundered. They had all striven to get into the yacht's boat, but those who had succeeded in doing so had gone down. The master of the yacht had seen the two brothers perish. Those who were saved had been picked up off the spars to which they had attached themselves. There was no doubt in the way of the new baronet, and no difficulty.

Nor was there any will made either by Sir Hugh or his brother. Poor Archie had nothing to leave, and that he should have left no will was not remarkable. But neither had there been much in the power of Sir Hugh to bequeath, nor was there any great cause for a will on his part. Had he left a son, his son would have inherited everything. He had, however, died childless, and his wife was provided for by her settlement. On his marriage he had made the amount settled as small as his wife's friends would accept, and no one who knew the man expected that he would increase the amount after his death. Having been in town for three days, the rector returned, being then in full possession of the title; but this he did not assume till after the second Sunday from the date of the telegram which brought the news.

In the meantime Harry had written to Florence, to whom the tidings were as important as to anyone concerned. She had left London very triumphant, quite confident that she had nothing now to fear from Lady Ongar or from any other living woman, having not only forgiven Harry his sins, but having succeeded also in persuading herself that there had been no sins to forgive — having quarreled with her brother half a dozen times in that he would not accept her arguments on this matter. He too would forgive Harry — had forgiven him — was quite ready to omit all further remark on the matter — but could not bring himself; when urged by Florence, to admit that her Apollo had been altogether godlike. Florence had thus left London in triumph, but she had gone with a conviction that she and Harry must remain apart for

some indefinite time, which probably must be measured by years. "Let us see at the end of two years," she had said; and Harry had been forced to be content. But how would it be with her now?

Harry of course began his letter by telling her of the catastrophe, with the usual amount of epithets. It was very terrible, awful, shocking — the saddest thing that had ever happened! The poor widow was in a desperate state, and all the Claverings were nearly beside themselves. But when this had been duly said, he allowed himself to go into their own home question. "I can not fail," he wrote, "to think of this chiefly as it concerns you — or rather as it concerns myself in reference to you. I suppose I shall leave the business now. Indeed, my father seems to think that my remaining there would be absurd, and my mother agrees with him. As I am the only son, the property will enable me to live easily without a profession. When I say *me*, of course you will understand what *me* means. The better part of *me* is so prudent that I know she will not accept this view of things without ever so much consideration, and therefore she must come to Clavering to hear it discussed by the elders. For myself; I can not bear to think that I should take delight in the results of this dreadful misfortune; but how am I to keep myself from being made happy by the feeling that we may now be married without further delay? After all that has passed, nothing will make me happy or even permanently comfortable till I can call you fairly my own. My mother has already said that she hopes you will come here in about a fortnight — that is, as soon as we shall have fallen tolerably into our places again; but she will write herself before that time. I have written a line to your brother, addressed to the office, which I suppose will find him. I have written also to Cecilia. Your brother, no doubt, will hear the news first through the French newspapers." Then he said a little, but a very little, as to their future modes of life, just intimating to her, and no more, that her destiny might probably call upon her to be the mother of a future baronet.

The news had reached Clavering on a Saturday. On the following Sunday everyone in the parish had no doubt heard of it, but nothing on the subject was said in church on that day. The rector remained at home during the morning, and the whole service was performed by Mr. Saul. But on the second Sunday Mr. Fielding had come over from Humbleton, and he preached a sermon on the loss which the parish had sustained in the sudden death of the two brothers. It is perhaps well that such sermons should be preached. The inhabitants of Clavering would have felt that their late lords had been treated like dogs had no word been said of them in the house of God. The nature of their fate had forbidden even the common ceremony of a burial service. It is well

that some respect should be maintained from the low in station toward those who are high, even where no respect has been deserved; and, for the widow's sake, it was well that some notice should be taken in Clavering of this death of the head of the Claverings; but I should not myself have liked the duty of preaching a eulogistic sermon on the lives and death of Hugh Clavering and his brother Archie. What had either of them ever done to merit a good word from any man, or to earn the love of any woman? That Sir Hugh had been loved by his wife had come from the nature of the woman, not at all from the qualities of the man. Both of the brothers had lived on the unexpressed theory of consuming, for the benefit of their own backs and their own bellies, the greatest possible amount of those good things which fortune might put in their way. I doubt whether either of them had ever contributed anything willingly to the comfort or happiness of any human being. Hugh, being powerful by nature, and having a strong will, had tyrannized over all those who were subject to him. Archie, not gifted as was his brother, had been milder, softer, and less actively hateful; but his principle of action had been the same. Everything for himself! Was it not well that two such men should be consigned to the fishes, and that the world — especially the Clavering world, and that poor widow, who now felt herself to be so inexpressibly wretched when her period of comfort was in truth only commencing — was it not well that the world and Clavering should be well quit of them? That idea is the one which one would naturally have felt inclined to put into one's sermon on such an occasion; and then to sing some song of rejoicing — either to do that, or to leave the matter alone.

But not so are such sermons preached, and not after that fashion did the young clergyman who had married the first cousin of these Claverings buckle himself to the subject. He indeed had, I think, but little difficulty, either inwardly with his conscience, or outwardly with his subject. He possessed the power of a pleasant, easy flow of words, and of producing tears, if not from other eyes, at any rate from his own. He drew a picture of the little ship amid the storm, and of God's hand as it moved in its anger upon the waters, but of the cause of that divine wrath and its direction he said nothing. Then, of the suddenness of death and its awfulness he said much, not insisting, as he did so, on the necessity of repentance for salvation, as far as those two poor sinners were concerned. No, indeed; how could any preacher have done that? But he improved the occasion by telling those around him that they should so live as to be ever ready for the hand of death. If that were possible, where then indeed would be the victory of the grave? And at last he came to the master and lord whom they had lost. Even here there

was no difficulty for him. The heir had gone first, and then the father and his brother. Who among them would not pity the bereaved mother and the widow? Who among them would not remember with affection the babe whom they had seen at that font, and with respect the landlord under whose rule they had lived? How pleasant it must be to ask those questions which no one can rise to answer! Farmer Gubbins, as he sat by, listening with what power of attention had been vouchsafed to him, felt himself to be somewhat moved, but soon released himself from the task, and allowed his mind to run away into other ideas. The rector was a kindly man and a generous. The rector would allow him to enclose that little bit of common land, that was to be taken in, without adding anything to his rent. The rector would be there on audit days, and things would be very pleasant. Farmer Gubbins, when the slight murmuring gurgle of the preacher's tears was heard, shook his own head by way of a responsive wail; but at that moment he was congratulating himself on the coming comfort of the new reign. Mr. Fielding, however, got great credit for his own sermon; and it did, probably, more good than harm — unless, indeed, we should take into our calculation, in giving our award on this subject, the permanent utility of all truth, and the permanent injury of all falsehood.

Mr. Fielding remained at the parsonage during the greater part of the following week, and then there took place a great deal of family conversation respecting the future incumbent of the living. At these family conclaves, however, Fanny was not asked to be present. Mrs. Clavering, who knew well how to do such work, was gradually bringing her husband round to endure the name of Mr. Saul. Twenty times had he asserted that he could not understand it; but, whether or no such understanding might ever be possible, he was beginning to recognize it as true that the thing not understood was a fact. His daughter Fanny was positively in love with Mr. Saul, and that to such an extent that her mother believed her happiness to be involved in it. "I can't understand it — upon my word I can't," said the rector for the last time, and then he gave way. There was now the means of giving an ample provision for the lovers, and that provision was to be given.

Mr. Fielding shook his head — not, in this instance, as to Fanny's predilection for Mr. Saul, though in discussing that matter with his own wife he had shaken his head very often, but he shook it now with reference to the proposed change. He was very well where he was. And although Clavering was better than Humbleton, it was not so much better as to induce him to throw his own family over by proposing to send Mr. Saul among them. Mr. Saul was an excellent clergyman, but perhaps his uncle, who had given him his living, might not like Mr.

Saul. Thus it was decided in these conclaves that Mr. Saul was to be the future rector of Clavering.

In the meantime poor Fanny moped — wretched in her solitude, anticipating no such glorious joys as her mother was preparing for her; and Mr. Saul was preparing with energy for his departure into foreign parts.

Lady Ongar was at Tenby when she received Mrs. Clavering's letter, and had not heard of the fate of her brother-in-law till the news reached her in that way. She had gone down to a lodging at Tenby with no attendant but one maid, and was preparing herself for the great surrender of her property which she meditated. Hitherto she had heard nothing from the Courtons or their lawyer as to the offer she had made about Ongar Park; but the time had been short, and lawyer's work, as she knew, was never done in a hurry. She had gone to Tenby, flying, in truth, from the loneliness of London to the loneliness of the seashore, but expecting she knew not what comfort from the change. She would take with her no carriage, and there would, as she thought, be excitement even in that. She would take long walks by herself — she would read — nay, if possible, she would study, and bring herself to some habits of industry. Hitherto she had failed in everything, but now she would try if some mode of success might not be open to her. She would ascertain, too, on what smallest sum she could live respectably and without penury, and would keep only so much out of Lord Ongar's wealth.

But hitherto her life at Tenby had not been successful. Solitary days were longer there even than they had been in London. People stared at her more; and, though she did not own it to herself, she missed greatly the comforts of her London house. As for reading, I doubt whether she did much better by the sea-side than she had done in the town. Men and women say that they will read, and think so — those, I mean, who have acquired no habit of reading — believing the work to be, of all works, the easiest. It may be work, they think, but of all works it must be the easiest of achievement. Given the absolute faculty of reading, the task of going through the pages of a book must be, of all tasks, the most certainly within the grasp of the man or woman who attempts it. Alas! no; if the habit be not there, of all tasks it is the most difficult. If a man have not acquired the habit of reading till he be old, he shall sooner in his old age learn to make shoes than learn the adequate use of a book. And worse again — under such circumstances the making of shoes shall be more pleasant to him than the reading of a book. Let those who are not old, who are still young, ponder this well. Lady Ongar, indeed, was not old, by no means too old to clothe herself in new habits; but even she was old enough to find that the doing so was a matter of much

difficulty. She had her books around her; but, in spite of her books, she was sadly in want of some excitement when the letter from Clavering came so her relief.

It was indeed a relief. Her brother-in-law dead, and he also who had so lately been her suitor! These two men whom she had so lately seen in lusty health — proud with all the pride of outward life — had both, by a stroke of the winds, been turned into nothing. A terrible retribution had fallen upon her enemy — for as her enemy she had ever regarded Hugh Clavering since her husband's death. She took no joy in this retribution. There was no feeling of triumph at her heart in that he had perished. She did not tell herself that she was glad, either for her own sake or for her sister's. But mingled with the awe she felt there was a something of unexpressed and inexpressible relief. Her present life was very grievous to her, and now had occurred that which would open to her new hopes and a new mode of living. Her brother-in-law had oppressed her by his very existence, and now he was gone. Had she had no brother-in-law who ought to have welcomed her, her return to England would not have been terrible to her as it had been. Her sister would be now restored to her, and her solitude would probably be at an end. And then the very excitement occasioned by the news was salutary to her. She was in truth, shocked. As she said to her maid, she felt it to be very dreadful. But, nevertheless, the day on which she received those tidings was less wearisome to her than any other of the days that she had passed at Tenby.

Poor Archie! Some feeling of a tear, some half-formed drop that was almost a tear, came to her eye as she thought of his fate. How foolish he had always been, how unintelligent, how deficient in all those qualities which recommend men to women! But the very memory of his deficiencies created something like a tenderness in his favor. Hugh was disagreeable, nay, hateful, by reason of the power which he possessed; whereas Archie was not hateful at all, and was disagreeable simply because nature had been a niggard to him. And then he had professed himself to be her lover. There had not been much in this; for he had come, of course, for her money; but even when that is the case, a woman will feel something for the man who has offered to link his lot with hers. Of all those to whom the fate of the two brothers had hitherto been matter of moment, I think that Lady Ongar felt more than any other for the fate of poor Archie.

And how would it affect Harry Clavering? She had desired to give Harry all the good things of the world, thinking that they would become him well — thinking that they would become him very well as reaching him from her hand. Now he would have them all, but would not have

them from her. Now he would have them all, and would share them with Florence Burton. Ah! if she could have been true to him in those early days — in those days when she had feared his poverty — would it not have been well now with her also? The measure of her retribution was come full home to her at last! Sir Harry Clavering! She tried the name, and found that it sounded very well. And she thought of the figure of the man and of his nature, and she knew that he would bear it with a becoming manliness. Sir Harry Clavering would be somebody in his county — would be a husband of whom his wife would be proud as he went about among his tenants and his gamekeepers, and perhaps on wider and better journeys, looking up the voters of his neighborhood. Yes, happy would be the wife of Sir Harry Clavering. He was a man who would delight in sharing his house, his hope; his schemes and councils with his wife. He would find a companion in his wife. He would do honor to his wife, and make much of her. He would like to see her go bravely. And then, if children came, how tender he would be to them! Whether Harry could ever have become a good head to a poor household might be doubtful, but no man had ever been born fitter for the position which he was now called upon to fill. It was thus that Lady Ongar thought of Harry Clavering as she owed to herself that the full measure of her just retribution had come home to her.

Of course she would go at once to Clavering Park. She wrote to her sister saying so, and the next day she started. She started so quickly on her journey that she reached the house not very many hours after her own letter. She was there when the rector started for London, and there when Mr. Fielding preached his sermon; but she did not see Mr. Clavering before he went, nor was she present to hear the eloquence of the younger clergyman. Till after that Sunday the only member of the family she had seen was Mrs. Clavering, who spent some period of every day up at the great house. Mrs. Clavering had not hitherto seen Lady Ongar since her return, and was greatly astonished at the change which so short a time had made. "She is handsomer than ever she was," Mrs. Clavering said to the rector; "—but it is that beauty which some women carry into middle life, and not the loveliness of youth." Lady Ongar's manner was cold and stately when first she met Mrs. Clavering. It was on the morning of her marriage when they had last met — when Julia Brabazon was resolving that she would look like a countess, and that to be a countess should be enough for her happiness. She could not but remember this now, and was unwilling at first to make confession of her failure by any meekness of conduct. It behooved her to be proud, at any rate till she should know how this new Lady Clavering would receive her. And then it was more than probable that this new Lady

Clavering knew all that had taken place between her and Harry. It behooved her, therefore, to hold her head on high.

But, before the week was over, Mrs. Clavering — for we will still call her so — had broken Lady Ongar's spirit by her kindness, and the poor, woman who had so much to bear had brought herself to speak of the weight of her burden. Julia had, on one occasion, called her Lady Clavering, and for the moment this had been allowed to pass without observation. The widowed lady was then present, and no notice of the name was possible. But soon afterward Mrs. Clavering made her little request on the subject. "I do not quite know what the custom may be," she said, "but do not call me so just yet. It will only be reminding Hermý of her bereavement."

"She is thinking of it always," said Julia.

"No doubt she is; but still the new name would wound her. And, indeed, it perplexes me also. Let it come by-and-by, when we are more settled."

Lady Ongar had truly said that her sister was as yet always thinking of her bereavement. To her now it was as though the husband she had lost had been a paragon among men. She could only remember of him his manliness, his power — a dignity of presence which he possessed — and the fact that to her he had been everything. She thought of that last vain caution which she had given him when with her hardly-permitted last embrace she had besought him to take care of himself. She did not remember now how coldly that embrace had been received, how completely those words had been taken as meaning nothing, how he had left her not only without a sign of affection, but without an attempt to repress the evidences of his indifference. But she did remember that she had had her arm upon his shoulder, and tried to think of that embrace as though it had been sweet to her. And she did remember how she had stood at the window, listening to the sounds of the wheels which took him off, and watching his form as long as her eye could rest upon it. Ah! what falsehoods she told herself now of her love to him, and of his goodness to her — pious falsehoods which would surely tend to bring some comfort to her wounded spirit.

But her sister could hardly bear to hear the praises of Sir Hugh. When she found how it was to be, she resolved that she would bear them — bear them, and not contradict them; but her struggle in doing so was great, and was almost too much for her.

"He had judged me and condemned me," she said at last, "and therefore, as a matter of course, we were not such friends when we last met as we used to be before my marriage."

"But, Julia, there was much for which you owed him gratitude."

"We will say nothing about that now, Hermy."

"I do not know why your mouth should be closed on such a subject because he has gone. I should have thought that you would be glad to acknowledge his kindness to you. But you were always hard."

"Perhaps I am hard."

"And twice he asked you to come here since your return, but you would not come."

"I have come now, Hermy, when I have thought that I might be of use."

"He felt it when you would not come before. I know he did." Lady Ongar could not but think of the way in which he had manifested his feelings on the occasion of his visit to Bolton Street. "I never could understand why you were so bitter."

"I think, dear, we had better not discuss that. I also have had much to bear — I as well as you. What you have borne has come in no wise from your own fault."

"No, indeed; I did not want him to go. I would have given anything to keep him at home."

Her sister had not been thinking of the suffering which had come to her from the loss of her husband, but of her former miseries. This, however, she did not explain. "No," Lady Ongar continued to say, "you have nothing for which to blame yourself, whereas I have much — indeed everything. If we are to remain together, as I hope we may, it will be better for us both that bygones should be bygones."

"Do you mean that I am never to speak of Hugh?"

"No, I by no means intend that; but I would rather that you should not refer to his feelings toward me. I think he did not quite understand the sort of life that I led while my husband was alive, and that he judged me amiss. Therefore I would have bygones be bygones."

Three or four days after this, when the question of leaving Clavering Park was being mooted, the elder sister started a difficulty as to money matters. An offer had been made to her by Mrs. Clavering to remain at the great house, but this she had declined, alleging that the place would be distasteful to her after her husband's death. She, poor soul! did not allege that it had been made distasteful to her forever by the solitude which she had endured there during her husband's lifetime! She would go away somewhere, and live as best she might upon her jointure. It was not very much, but it would be sufficient. She did not see, she said, how she could live with her sister, because she did not wish to be dependent. Julia, of course, would live in a style to which she could make no pretence.

Mrs. Clavering, who was present, as was also Lady Ongar, declared that she saw no such difficulty. "Sisters together," she said, "need hardly think of a difference in such matters."

Then it was that Lady Ongar first spoke to either of them of her half-formed resolution about her money, and then too, for the first time, did she come down altogether from that high horse on which she had been, as it were, compelled to mount herself while in Mrs. Clavering's presence. "I think I must explain," said she, "something of what I mean to do — about my money, that is. I do not think that there will be much difference between me and Hermie in that respect."

"That is nonsense," said her sister, fretfully.

"There will be a difference in income, certainly," said Mrs. Clavering, "but I do not see that that need create any uncomfortable feeling."

"Only one doesn't like to be dependent," said Hermione.

"You shall not be asked to give up any of your independence," said Julia, with a smile — a melancholy smile, that gave but little sign of pleasantness within. Then, on a sudden, her face became stern and hard. "The fact is," she said, "I do not intend to keep Lord Ongar's money."

"Not to keep your income!" said Hermione.

"No; I will give it back to them — or at least the greater part of it. Why should I keep it?"

"It is your own," said Mrs. Clavering.

"Yes, legally it is my own. I know that. And when there was some question whether it should not be disputed, I would have fought for it to the last shilling. Somebody — I suppose it was the lawyer — wanted to keep from me the place in Surrey. I told them that then I would not abandon my right to an inch of it. But they yielded, and now I have given them back the house."

"You have given it back!" said her sister.

"Yes; I have said they may have it. It is of no use to me. I hate the place."

"You have been very generous," said Mrs. Clavering.

"But that will not affect your income," said Hermione.

"No, that would not affect my income." Then she paused, not knowing how to go on with the story of her purpose.

"If I may say so, Lady Ongar," said Mrs. Clavering, "I would not, if I were you, take any steps in so important a matter without advice."

"Who is there that can advise me? Of course the lawyer tells me that I ought to keep it all. It is his business to give such advice as that. But what does he know of what I feel? How can he understand me? How, indeed, can I expect that anyone shall understand me?"

"But it is possible that people should misunderstand you," said Mrs. Clavering.

"Exactly. That is just what he says. But, Mrs. Clavering, I care nothing for that. I care nothing for what any body says or thinks. What is it to me what they say?"

"I should have thought it was everything," said her sister.

"No, it is nothing — nothing at all." Then she was again silent, and was unable to express herself. She could not bring herself to declare in words that self-condemnation of her own conduct which was now weighing so heavily upon her. It was not that she wished to keep back her own feelings either from her sister or from Mrs. Clavering, but that the words in which to express them were wanting to her.

"And have they accepted the house?" Mrs. Clavering asked.

"They must accept it. What else can they do? They can not make me call it mine if I do not choose. If I refuse to take the income which Mr. Courton's lawyer pays in to my bankers, they can not compel me to have it."

"But you are not going to give that up too?" said her sister.

"I am. I will not have his money — not more than enough to keep me from being a scandal to his family. I will not have it. It is a curse to me, and has been from the first. What right have I to all that money, because — because — because —" She could not finish her sentence, but turned away from them, and walked by herself to the window.

Lady Clavering looked at Mrs. Clavering as though she thought that her sister was mad. "Do you understand her?" said Lady Clavering, in a whisper.

"I think I do," said the other. "I think I know what is passing in her mind." Then she followed Lady Ongar across the room, and, taking her gently by the arm, tried to comfort her — to comfort her and to argue with her as to the rashness of that which she proposed to do. She endeavored to explain to the poor woman how it was that she should at this moment be wretched, and anxious to do that which, if done, would put it out of her power afterward to make herself useful in the world. It shocked the prudence of Mrs. Clavering — this idea of abandoning money, the possession of which was questioned by no one. "They do not want it, Lady Ongar," she said.

"That has nothing to do with it," answered the other.

"And nobody has any suspicion but what it is honorably and fairly your own."

"But does any body ever think how I got it?" said Lady Ongar, turning sharply round upon Mrs. Clavering. "You — you — you — do you dare to tell me what you think of the way in which it became mine? Could

you bear it, if it had become yours after such a fashion? I can not bear it, and I will not." She was now speaking with so much violence that her sister was awed into silence, and Mrs. Clavering herself found a difficulty in answering her.

"Whatever may have been the past," said she, "the question now is how to do the best for the future."

"I had hoped," continued Lady Ongar, without noticing what was said to her, "I had hoped to make everything straight by giving his money to another. You know to whom I mean, and so does Hermy. I thought, when I returned, that, bad as I had been, I might still do some good in the world. But it is as they tell us in the sermons. One can not make good come out of evil. I have done evil, and nothing but evil has come out of the evil which I have done. Nothing but evil will come from it. As for being useful in the world, I know of what use I am! When women hear how wretched I have been, they will be unwilling to sell themselves as I did." Then she made her way to the door and left the room, going out with quiet steps, and closing the lock behind her with a sound.

"I did not know that she was such as that," said Mrs. Clavering.

"Nor did I. She has never spoken in that way before."

"Poor soul! Hermione, you see there are those in the world whose sufferings are worse than yours."

"I don't know," said Lady Clavering. "She never lost what I have lost — never."

"She has lost what I am sure you will never lose, her own self-esteem. But, Hermy, you should be good to her. We must all be good to her. Will it not be better that you should stay with us for a while — both of you."

"What! here at the park?"

"We will make room for you at the rectory, if you would like it."

"Oh no, I will go away. I shall be better away. I suppose she will not be like that often, will she?"

"She was much moved just now."

"And what does she mean about her income? She can not be in earnest."

"She is in earnest now."

"And can not it be prevented? Only think — it; after all, she were to give up her jointure! Mrs. Clavering, you do not think she is mad, do you?"

Mrs. Clavering said what she could to comfort the elder and weaker sister on this subject, explaining to her that the Courtons would not be at all likely to take advantage of any wild generosity on the part of Lady

Ongar, and then she walked home across the park, meditating on the character of the two sisters.

Chapter I

Madam Gordeloup Retires From British Diplomacy

The reader must be asked to accompany me once more to that room in Mount Street in which poor Archie practiced diplomacy, and whither the courageous Doodles was carried prisoner in those moments in which he was last seen of us. The Spy was now sitting alone before her desk, scribbling with all her energy — writing letters on foreign policy, no doubt, to all the courts of Europe, but especially to that Russian court to which her services were more especially due. She was hard at work, when there came the sound of a step upon the stairs. The practiced ear of the Spy became erect, and she at once knew who was her visitor. It was not one with whom diplomacy would much avail, or who was likely to have money ready under his glove for her behalf. “Ah! Edouard, is that you? I am glad you have come,” she said, as Count Pateroff entered the room.

“Yes, it is I. I got your note yesterday.”

“You are good — very good. You are always good.” Sophie, as she said this, went on very rapidly with her letters — so rapidly that her hand seemed to run about the paper wildly. Then she flung down her pen, and folded the paper on which she had been writing with marvelous quickness. There was an activity about the woman in all her movements which was wonderful to watch. “There,” she said, “that is done; now we can talk. Ah! I have nearly written off my fingers this morning.” Her brother smiled, but said nothing about the letters. He never allowed himself to allude in any way to her professional duties.

“So you are going to St. Petersburg?” he said.

“Well — yes, I think. Why should I remain here spending money with both hands and through the nose?” At this idea the brother again smiled

pleasantly. He had never seen his sister to be culpably extravagant as she now described herself. "Nothing to get and everything to lose," she went on saying.

"You know your own affairs best," he answered.

"Yes, I know my own affairs. If I remained here I should be taken away to that black building there;" and she pointed in the direction of the workhouse, which fronts so gloomily upon Mount Street. "You would not come to take me out."

The count smiled again. "You are too clever for that, Sophie, I think."

"Ah! it is well for a woman to be clever, or she must starve — yes, starve! Such a one as I must starve in this accursed country if I were not what you call clever." The brother and sister were talking in French, and she spoke now almost as rapidly as she had written. "They are beasts and fools, and as awkward as bulls — yes, as bulls. I hate them — I hate them all. Men, women, children, they are all alike. Look at the street out there. Though it is Summer, I shiver when I look out at its blackness. It is the ugliest nation! And they understand nothing. Oh, how I hate them!"

"They are not without merit. They have got money."

"Money — yes. They have got money, and they are so stupid you may take it from under their eyes. They will not see you. But of their own hearts they will give you nothing. You see that black building — the workhouse. I call it Little England. It is just the same. The naked, hungry, poor wretches lie at the door, and the great fat beadles swell about like turkey-cocks inside."

"You have been here long enough to know, at any rate."

"Yes, I have been here long — too long. I have made my life a wilderness, staying here in this country of barracks. And what have I got for it? I came back because of that woman, and she has thrown me over. That is your fault — yours — yours!"

"And you have sent for me to tell me that again?"

"No, Edouard. I sent for you that you might see your sister once more — that I might once more see my brother." This she said leaning forward on the table, on which her arms rested, and looking steadfastly into his face with eyes moist — just moist, with a tear in each. Whether Edouard was too unfeeling to be moved by this show of affection, or whether he gave more credit to his sister's histrionic powers than to those of her heart, I will not say, but he was altogether irresponsive to her appeal. "You will be back again before long," he said.

"Never! I will come back to this accursed country never again. No, I am going once and for all. I will soil myself with the mud of its gutters no more. I came for the sake of Julie; and now — how has she treated

me?" Edouard shrugged his shoulders. "And you — how has she treated you?"

"Never mind me."

"Ah! but I must mind you. Only that you would not let me manage, it might be yours now — yes, all. Why did you come down to that accursed island?"

"It was my way to play my game. Leave that alone, Sophie." And there came a frown over the brother's brow.

"Your way to play your game! Yes; and what has become of mine? You have destroyed mine, but you think nothing of that. After all that I have gone through, to have nothing; and through you — my brother! Ah! that is the hardest of all — when I was putting all things in train for you."

"You are always putting things in train. Leave your trains alone, where I am concerned."

"But why did you come to that place in the accursed island? I am ruined by that journey. Yes, I am ruined. You will not help me to get a shilling from her — not even for my expenses."

"Certainly not. You are clever enough to do your own work without my aid."

"And is that all from a brother? Well! And, now that they have drowned themselves — the two Claverings — the fool and the brute, and she can do what she pleases —"

"She could always do as she pleased since Lord Ongar died."

"Yes; but she is more lonely than ever now. That cousin who is the greatest fool of all, who might have had everything — *mon Dieu!* yes, everything — she would have given it all to him with a sweep of her hand if he would have taken it. He is to marry himself to a little brown girl who has not a shilling. No one but an Englishman could make follies so abominable as these. Ah! I am sick — I am sick when I remember it!" And Sophie gave unmistakable signs of a grief which could hardly have been self interested. But, in truth, she suffered pain in seeing a good game spoiled. It was not that she had any wish for Harry Clavering's welfare. Had he gone to the bottom of the sea in the same boat with his cousins, the tidings of his fate would have been pleasurable to her rather than otherwise. But when she saw such cards thrown away as he had held in his hand, she encountered that sort of suffering which a good player feels when he sits behind the chair of one who plays up to his adversary's trump, and makes no tricks of his own kings and aces.

"He may marry himself to the devil if he please — it is nothing to me," said the count.

"But she is there — by herself — at that place — what is it called? Ten — bie. Will you not go now, when you can do no harm?"

"No, I will not go now."

"And in a year she will have taken some other one for her husband."

"What is that to me? But look here, Sophie, far you may as well understand me at once, if I were ever to think of Lady Ongar again as my wife, I should not tell you."

"And why not tell me — your sister?"

"Because it would do me no good. If you had not been there she would have been my wife now."

"Edouard!"

"What I say is true. But I do not want to reproach you because of that. Each of us was playing his own game, and your game was not my game. You are going now, and if I play my game again I can play it alone."

Upon hearing this, Sophie sat a while in silence, looking at him. "You will play it alone," she said at last. "You would rather do that?"

"Much rather, if I play any game at all."

"And you will give me something to go?"

"Not one sou."

"You will not — not a sou?"

"Not half a sou — for you to go or stay. Sophie, are you not a fool to ask me for money?"

"And you are a fool — a fool who knows nothing. You need not look at me like that. I am not afraid. I shall remain here. I shall stay and do as the lawyer tells me. He says that if I bring my action she must pay me for my expenses. I will bring my action. I am not going to leave it all to you. No. Do you remember those days in Florence? I have not been paid yet, but I will be paid. One hundred and seventy-five thousand francs a year — and, after all, I am to have none of it! Say — should it become yours, will you do something for your sister?"

"Nothing at all — nothing. Sophie, do you think I am fool enough to bargain in such a matter?"

"Then I will stay. Yes, I will bring my action. All the world shall hear, and they shall know how you have destroyed me and yourself. Ah! you think I am afraid — that I will not spend my money. I will spend all — all — all; and I will be revenged."

"You may go or stay, it is the same thing to me. Now, if you please, I will take my leave." And he got up from his chair to leave her.

"It is the same thing to you?"

"Quite the same."

"Then I will stay, and she shall hear my name every day of her life — every hour. She shall be so sick of me and of you that — that — that — Oh, Edouard!" This last appeal was made to him because he was already at the door, and could not be stopped in any other way.

"What else have you to say, my sister?"

"Oh, Edouard, what would I not give to see all those riches yours? Has it not been my dearest wish? Edouard, you are ungrateful. All men are ungrateful." Now, having succeeded in stopping him, she buried her face in the corner of the sofa and wept plentifully. It must be presumed that her acting before her brother must have been altogether thrown away; but the acting was, nevertheless, very good.

"If you are in truth going to St. Petersburg," he said, "I will bid you adieu now. If not — *au revoir*."

"I am going. Yes, Edouard, I am. I can not bear this country longer. My heart is being torn to pieces. All my affections are outraged. Yes, I am going — perhaps on Monday — perhaps on Monday week. But I go in truth. My brother, adieu." Then she got up, and, putting a hand on each of his shoulders, lifted up her face to be kissed. He embraced her in the manner proposed, and turned to leave her. But before he went she made to him one other petition, holding him by the arm as she did so. "Edouard, you can lend me twenty napoleons till I am at St. Petersburg?"

"No, Sophie, no."

"Not lend your sister twenty napoleons!"

"No, Sophie. I never lend money. It is a rule."

"Will you give me five? I am so poor. I have almost nothing."

"Things are not so bad with you as that, I hope?"

"Ah! yes, they are very bad. Since I have been in this accursed city — now, this time, what have I got? Nothing — nothing. She was to be all in all to me, and she has given me nothing! It is very bad to be so poor. Say that you will give me five napoleons — oh my brother." she was still hanging by his arm, and, as she did so, she looked up into his face with tears in her eyes. As he regarded her, bending down his face over hers, a slight smile came upon his countenance. Then he put his hand into his pocket, and, taking out his purse, handed to her five sovereigns.

"Only five!" she said.

"Only five," he answered.

"A thousand thanks, oh my brother." Then she kissed him again, and after that he went. She accompanied him to the top of the stairs, and from thence showered blessings on his head till she heard the lock of the door closed behind him. When he was altogether gone she unlocked an inner drawer in her desk, and, taking out an uncompleted rouleau

of gold, added her brother's sovereigns thereto. The sum he had given her was exactly wanted to make up the required number of twenty-five. She counted them half a dozen times to be quite sure, and then rolled them carefully in paper, and sealed the little packet at each end. "Ah!" she said, speaking to herself, "they are very nice. Nothing else English is nice, but only these." There were many rolls of money there before her in the drawer of the desk — some ten, perhaps, or twelve. These she took out one after another, passing them lovingly through her fingers, looking at the little seals at the ends of each, weighing them in her hand as though to make sure that no wrong had been done to them in her absence, standing them up one against another to see that they were of the same length. We may be quite sure that Sophie Gordeloup brought no sovereigns with her to England when she came over with Lady Ongar after the earl's death, and that the hoard before her contained simply the plunder which she had collected during this her latest visit to the "accursed" country which she was going to leave.

But before she started she was resolved to make one more attempt upon that mine of wealth which, but a few weeks ago, had seemed to lie open before her. She had learned from the servants in Bolton Street that Lady Ongar was with Lady Clavering at Clavering Park, and she addressed a letter to her there. This letter she wrote in English, and she threw into her appeal all the pathos of which she was capable.

Mount Street, October 186—

DEAREST JULIE: —

I do not think you would wish me to go away from this country forever — forever, without one word of farewell to her I love so fondly. Yes, I have loved you with all my heart, and now I am going away — forever. Shall we not meet each other once, and have one embrace? No trouble will be too much to me for that. No journey will be too long. Only say, Sophie, come to your Julie.

I must go, because I am so poor. Yes, I can not live longer here without the means. I am not ashamed to say to my Julie, who is rich, that I am poor. No; nor would I be ashamed to wait on my Julie like a slave if she would let me. My Julie was angry with me because of my brother! Was it my fault that he came upon us in our little retreat, where we were so happy? Oh, no. I told him not to come. I knew his coming was for nothing — nothing at all. I knew where was the heart of my Julie — my poor Julie! But he was not worth that heart, and the pearl was thrown before a pig. But my brother — Ah! he has ruined me. Why am I separated from my Julie but for him? Well, I can go away, and in my own countries

there are those who will not wish to be separated from Sophie Gordeloup.

May I now tell my Julie in what condition is her poor friend? She will remember how it was that my feet brought me to England — to England, to which I had said farewell forever — to England, where people must be rich like my Julie before they can eat and drink. I thought nothing then but of my Julie. I stopped not on the road to make merchandise — what you call a bargain — about my coming. No; I came at once, leaving all things — my little affairs — in confusion, because my Julie wanted me to come! It was in the Winter. Oh, that Winter! My poor bones shall never forget it. They are racked still with the pains which your savage winds have given them. And now it is Autumn. Ten months have I been here, and I have eaten up my little substance. Oh, Julie, you, who are so rich, do not know what is the poverty of your Sophie!

A lawyer have told me — not a French lawyer, but an English — that somebody should pay me everything. He says the law would give it me. He have offered me the money himself, just to let him make an action. But I have said no. No, Sophie will not have an action with her Julie. She would scorn that; and so the lawyer went away. But if my Julie will think of this, and will remember her Sophie — how much she have expended, and now at last there is nothing left. She must go and beg among her friends. And why? Because she have loved her Julie too well. You, who are so rich, would miss it not at all. What would two-three hundred pounds be to my Julie?

Shall I come to you? Say so; say so, and I will go at once, if I did crawl on my knees. Oh, what a joy to see my Julie! And do not think I will trouble you about money. No, your Sophie will be too proud for that. Not a word will I say but to love you. Nothing will I do but to print one kiss on my Julie's forehead, and then to retire forever, asking God's blessing for her dear head.

Thine — always thine,
Sophie

Lady Ongar, when she received this letter, was a little perplexed by it, not feeling quite sure in what way she might best answer it. It was the special severity of her position that there was no one to whom, in such difficulties, she could apply for advice. Of one thing she was quite sure — that, willingly, she would never again see her devoted Sophie. And she knew that the woman deserved no money from her; that she had deserved none, but had received much. Every assertion in her letter was false. No one had wished her to come, and the expense of her coming

had been paid for her over and over again. Lady Ongar knew that she had money, and knew also that she would have had immediate recourse to law if any lawyer would have suggested to her, with a probability of success, that he could get more for her. No doubt she had been telling her story to some attorney, in the hope that money might thus be extracted, and had been dragging her Julie's name through the mud, telling all she knew of that wretched Florentine story. As to all that Lady Ongar had no doubt, and yet she wished to send the woman money!

There are services for which one is ready to give almost any amount of money payment, if only one can be sure that that money payment will be taken as sufficient recompense for the service in question. Sophie Gordeloup had been useful. She had been very disagreeable, but she had been useful. She had done things which nobody else could have done, and she had done her work well. That she had been paid for her work over and over again there was no doubt; but Lady Ongar was willing to give her yet further payment, if only there might be an end of it. But she feared to do this, dreading the nature and cunning of the little woman — lest she should take such payment as an acknowledgment of services for which secret compensation must be made, and should then proceed to further threats. Thinking much of all this, Julie at last wrote to her Sophie as follows:

Lady Ongar presents her compliments to Madam Gordeloup, and must decline to see Madam Gordeloup again after what has passed. Lady Ongar is very sorry to hear that Madam Gordeloup is in want of funds. Whatever assistance Lady Ongar might have been willing to afford, she now feels that she is prohibited from giving any by the allusion which Madam Gordeloup has made to legal advice. If Madam Gordeloup has legal demands on Lady Ongar which are said by a lawyer to be valid, Lady Ongar would strongly recommend Madam Gordeloup to enforce them.

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This she wrote, acting altogether on her own judgment, and sent off by return of post. She almost wept at her own cruelty after the letter was gone, and greatly doubted her own discretion. But of whom could she have asked advice? Could she have told all the story of Madam Gordeloup to the rector or to the rector's wife? The letter, no doubt, was a discreet letter, but she greatly doubted her own discretion, and when she received her Sophie's rejoinder, she hardly dared to break the envelope.

Poor Sophie! Her Julie's letter nearly broke her heart. For sincerity little credit was due to her — but some little was perhaps due. That she

should be called Madam Gordeloup, and have compliments presented to her by the woman — by the countess with whom and with whose husband she had been on such closely familiar terms, did in truth wound some tender feelings within her breast. Such love as she had been able to give, she had given to her Julie. That she had always been willing to rob her Julie — to make a milk-cow of her Julie — to sell her Julie — to threaten her Julie — to quarrel with her Julie, if aught might be done in that way — to expose her Julie — nay, to destroy her Julie, if money was to be made — all this did not hinder her love. She loved her Julie, and was broken-hearted that her Julie should have written to her in such a strain.

But her feelings were much more acute when she came to perceive that she had damaged her own affairs by the hint of a menace which she had thrown out. Business is business, and must take precedence of all sentiment and romance in this hard world in which bread is so necessary. Of that Madam Gordeloup was well aware. And therefore, having given herself but two short minutes to weep over her Julie's hardness, she applied her mind at once to the rectification of the error she had made. Yes, she had been wrong about the lawyer — certainly wrong. But then these English people were so pig-headed! A slight suspicion of a hint, such as that she had made, would have been taken by a Frenchman, by a Russian, by a Pole, as meaning no more than it meant. "But these English are bulls the men and the women are all like bulls — bulls!"

She at once sat down and wrote another letter — another in such an ecstasy of eagerness to remove the evil impressions which she had made, that she wrote it almost with the natural effusions of her heart:

DEAR FRIEND: —

Your coldness kills me — kills me! But perhaps I have deserved it. If I said there were legal demands I did deserve it. No, there are none. Legal demands! Oh, no. What can your poor friend demand legally? The lawyer — he knows nothing; he was a stranger. It was my brother spoke to him. What should I do with a lawyer? Oh, my friend, do not be angry with your poor servant. I write now not to ask for money, but for a kind word — for one word of kindness and love to your Sophie before she have gone forever — yes, forever. Oh, Julie — oh, my angel, I would lie at your feet and kiss them if you were here.

Yours till death, even though you should still be hard to me,
Sophie

To this appeal Lady Ongar sent no direct answer, but she commissioned Mr. Turnbull, her lawyer, to call upon Madam Gordeloup and pay to that lady one hundred pounds, taking her receipt for the same. Lady Ongar, in her letter to the lawyer, explained that the woman in question had been useful in Florence, and explained also that she might pretend that she had further claims. "If so," said Lady Ongar, "I wish you to tell her that she can prosecute them at law, if she pleases. The money I now give her is a gratuity made for certain services rendered in Florence during the illness of Lord Ongar." This commission Mr. Turnbull executed, and Sophie Gordeloup, when taking the money, made no demand for any further payment.

Four days after this a little woman, carrying a very big bandbox in her hands, might have been seen to scramble with difficulty out of a boat in the Thames up the side of a steamer bound from thence for Boulogne; and after her there climbed up an active little man, who, with peremptory voice, repulsed the boatman's demand for further payment. He also had a bandbox on his arm, belonging, no doubt, to the little woman. And it might have been seen that the active little man, making his way to the table at which the clerk of the boat was sitting, out of his own purse paid the passage-money for two passengers through to Paris. And the head, and legs, and neck of that little man were like to the head, and legs, and neck of — our friend Doodles, alias Captain Boodle, of Warwickshire.

Chapter LI

Showing How Things Settled Themselves At The Rectory

When Harry's letter, with the tidings of the fate of his cousins, reached Florence at Stratton, the whole family was, not unnaturally, thrown into great excitement. Being slow people, the elder Burtons had hardly as yet realized the fact that Harry was again to be accepted among

the Burton Penates as a pure divinity. Mrs. Burton, for some weeks past, had grown to be almost sublime in her wrath against him. That a man should live and treat her daughter as Florence was about to be treated! Had not her husband forbidden such a journey, as being useless in regard to the expenditure, she would have gone up to London that she might have told Harry what she thought of him. Then came the news that Harry was again a divinity — an Apollo, whom the Burton Penates ought only to be too proud to welcome to a seat among them!

And now came this other news that this Apollo was to be an Apollo indeed! When the god first became a god again, there was still a cloud upon the minds of the elder Burtons as to the means by which the divinity was to be sustained. A god in truth, but a god with so very moderate an annual income — unless, indeed, those old Burtons made it up to an extent which seemed to them to be quite unnatural! There was joy among the Burtons, of course, but the joy was somewhat dimmed by these reflections as to the slight means of their Apollo. A lover who was not an Apollo might wait; but, as they had learned already, there was danger in keeping such a god as this suspended on the tenterhooks of expectation.

But now there came the further news! This Apollo of theirs had already a place of his own among the gods of Olympus. He was the eldest son of a man of large fortune, and would be a baronet! He had already declared that he would marry at once — that his father wished him to do so, and that an abundant income would be forthcoming. As to his eagerness for an immediate marriage, no divinity in or out of the heavens could behave better. Old Mrs. Burton, as she went through the process of taking him again to her heart, remembered that that virtue had been his even before the days of his backsliding had come — a warm-hearted, eager, affectionate divinity, with only this against him, that he wanted some careful looking after in these his unsettled days. "I really do think that he'll be as fond of his own fireside as any other man, when he has once settled down," said Mrs. Burton.

It will not, I hope, be taken as a blot on the character of this mother that she was much elated at the prospect of the good things which were to fall to her daughter's lot. For herself she desired nothing. For her daughters she had coveted only good, substantial, painstaking husbands, who would fear God and mind their business. When Harry Clavering had come across her path and had demanded a daughter from her, after the manner of the other young men who had learned the secrets of their profession at Stratton, she had desired nothing more than that he and Florence should walk in the path which had been followed by her sisters and their husbands. But then had come that terrible fear, and now had

come these golden prospects. That her daughter should be Lady Clavering, of Clavering Park! She could not but be elated at the thought of it. She would not live to see it, but the consciousness that it would be so was pleasant in her old age. Florence had ever been regarded as the flower of the flock, and now she would be taken up into high places, according to her deserts.

First had come the letter from Harry, and then, after an interval of a week, another letter from Mrs. Clavering, pressing her dear Florence to go to the parsonage. "We think that at present we all ought to be together," said Mrs. Clavering, "and therefore we want you to be with us." It was very flattering. "I suppose I ought to go, mamma," said Florence. Mrs. Burton was of opinion that she certainly ought to go. "You should write to her ladyship at once," said Mrs. Burton, mindful of the change which had taken place. Florence, however, addressed her letter, as heretofore, to Mrs. Clavering, thinking that a mistake on that side would be better than a mistake on the other. It was not for her to be overmindful of the rank with which she was about to be connected. "You won't forget your old mother now that you are going to be so grand?" said Mrs. Burton, as Florence was leaving her.

"You only say that to laugh at me," said Florence. "I expect no grandness, and I am sure you expect no forgetfulness."

The solemnity consequent upon the first news of the accident had worn itself off; and Florence found the family at the parsonage happy and comfortable. Mrs. Fielding was still there, and Mr. Fielding was expected again after the next Sunday. Fanny also was there, and Florence could see during the first half hour that she was very radiant. Mr. Saul, however, was not there, and it may as well be said at once that Mr. Saul as yet knew nothing of his coming fortune. Florence was received with open arms by them all, and by Harry with arms which were almost too open. "I suppose it may be in about three weeks from now," he said at the first moment in which he could have her to himself.

"Oh, Harry — no," said Florence.

"No — why no? That's what my mother proposes."

"In three weeks! She could not have said that. Nobody has begun to think of such a thing yet at Stratton."

"They are so very slow at Stratton!"

"And you are so very fast at Clavering! But, Harry, we don't know where we are going to live."

"We should go abroad at first, I suppose."

"And what then? That would only be for a month or so."

"Only for a month? I mean for all the Winter — and the Spring. Why not? One can see nothing in a month. If we are back for the shooting

next year, that would do; and then, of course, we should come here. I should say next Winter — that is, the Winter after the next — we might as well stay with them at the big house, and then we could look about us, you know. I should like a place near to this, because of the hunting.”

Florence, when she heard all this, became aware that in talking about a month she had forgotten herself. She had been accustomed to holidays of a month's duration, and to honeymoon trips fitted to such vacations. A month was the longest holiday ever heard of in the chambers of the Adelphi, or at the house in Onslow Crescent. She had forgotten herself. It was not to be the lot of her husband to earn his bread, and fit himself to such periods as business might require. Then Harry went on describing the tour which he had arranged — which, as he said, he only suggested. But it was quite apparent that in this matter he intended to be paramount. Florence indeed made no objection. To spend a fortnight in Paris — to hurry over the Alps before the cold weather came — to spend a month in Florence, and then go on to Rome — it would all be very nice. But she declared that it would suit the next year better than this.

“Suit ten thousand fiddlesticks,” said Harry.

“But it is October now.”

“And therefore there is no time to lose.”

“I haven't a dress in the world but the one I have on, and a few others like it. Oh, Harry, how can you talk in that way?”

“Well, say four weeks then from now. That will make it the seventh of November, and we'll only stay a day or two in Paris. We can do Paris next year — in May. If you'll agree to that, I'll agree.” But Florence's breath was taken away from her, and she could agree to nothing. She did agree to nothing till she had been talked into doing so by Mrs. Clavering.

“My dear,” said her future mother-in-law, “what you say is undoubtedly true. There is no absolute necessity for hurrying. It is not an affair of life and death. But you and Harry have been engaged quite long enough now, and I really don't see why you should put it off. If you do as he asks you, you will just have time to make yourselves comfortable before the cold weather begins.”

“But mamma will be so surprised.”

“I'm sure she will wish it, my dear. You see Harry is a young man of that sort — so impetuous I mean, you know, and so eager — and so — you know what I mean — that the sooner he is married the better. You can't but take it as a compliment, Florence, that he is so eager.”

“Of course I do.”

"And you should reward him. Believe me, it will be best that it should not be delayed." Whether or no Mrs. Clavering had present in her imagination the possibility of any further danger that might result from Lady Ongar, I will not say, but if so she altogether failed in communicating her idea to Florence.

"Then I must go home at once," said Florence, driven almost to bewail the terrors of her position.

"You can write home at once and tell your mother. You can tell her all that I say, and I am sure she will agree with me. If you wish it, I will write a line to Mrs. Burton myself." Florence said that she would wish it. "And we can begin, you know, to get your things ready here. People don't take so long about all that nowadays as they used to do." When Mrs. Clavering had turned against her, Florence knew that she had no hope, and surrendered, subject to the approval of the higher authorities at Stratton. The higher authorities at Stratton approved also, of course, and Florence found herself fixed to a day with a suddenness that bewildered her. Immediately — almost as soon as the consent had been extorted from her — she began to be surrounded with incipient preparation for the event, as to which, about three weeks since, she had made up her mind it would never come to pass.

On the second day of her arrival, in the privacy of her bedroom, Fanny communicated to her the decision of her family in regard to Mr. Saul. But she told the story at first as though this decision referred to the living only — as though the rectory were to be conferred on Mr. Saul without any burden attached to it. "He has been here so long, dear," said Fanny, "and understands the people so well."

"I am so delighted," said Florence.

"I am sure it is the best thing papa could do — that is, if he quite makes up his mind to give up the parish himself."

This troubled Florence, who did not know that a baronet could hold a living.

"I thought he must give up being a clergyman now that Sir Hugh is dead?"

"Oh dear, no." And then Fanny, who was great on ecclesiastical subjects, explained it all. "Even though he were to be a peer, he could hold a living if he pleased. A great many baronets are clergymen, and some of them do hold preferments. As to papa, the doubt has been with him whether he would wish to give up the work. But he will preach sometimes, you know, though of course he will not be able to do that unless Mr. Saul lets him. No one but the rector has a right to his own pulpit except the bishop, and he can preach three times a year if he likes it."

"And suppose the bishop wanted to preach four times?"

"He couldn't do it — at least I believe not. But, you see, he never wants to preach at all — not in such a place as this — so that does not signify."

"And will Mr. Saul come and live here, in this house?"

"Some day I suppose he will," said Fanny, blushing.

"And you, dear?"

"I don't know how that may be."

"Come, Fanny."

"Indeed I don't, Florence, or I would tell you. Of course Mr. Saul has asked me. I never had any secret with you about that — have I?"

"No; you were very good."

"Then he asked me again — twice again. And then there came — oh, such a quarrel between him and papa. It was so terrible. Do you know, I believe they wouldn't speak in the vestry! Not but what each of them has the highest possible opinion of the other. But of course Mr. Saul couldn't marry on a curacy. When I think of it, it really seems that he must have been mad."

"But you don't think him so mad now, dear?"

"He doesn't know a word about it yet — not a word. He hasn't been in the house since, and papa and he didn't speak — not in a friendly way — till the news came of poor Hugh's being drowned. Then he came up to papa, and, of course, papa took his hand. But he still thinks he is going away."

"And when is he to be told that he needn't go?"

"That is the difficulty. Mamma will have to do it, I believe. But what she will say I'm sure I, for one, can't think."

"Mrs. Clavering will have no difficulty."

"You mustn't call her Mrs. Clavering."

"Lady Clavering, then."

"That's a great deal worse. She's your mamma now — not quite so much as she is mine, but the next thing to it."

"She'll know what to say to Mr. Saul."

"But what is she to say?"

"Well, Fanny, you ought to know that. I suppose you do — love him?"

"I have never told him so."

"But you will?"

"It seems so odd. Mamma will have to — Suppose he were to turn round and say he didn't want me."

"That would be awkward."

"He would in a minute, if that was what he felt. The idea of having the living would not weigh with him a bit."

"But when he was so much in love before, it won't make him out of love, will it?"

"I don't know," said Fanny. "At any rate, mamma is to see him tomorrow, and after that I suppose — I'm sure I don't know — but I suppose he'll come to the rectory as he used to do."

"How happy you must be," said Florence, kissing her. To this Fanny made some unintelligible demur. It was undoubtedly possible that, under the altered circumstances of the case, so strange a being as Mr. Saul might have changed his mind.

There was a great trial awaiting Florence Burton. She had to be taken up to call on the ladies at the great house — on the two widowed ladies who were still remaining there when she came to Clavering. It was only on the day before her arrival that Harry had seen Lady Ongar. He had thought much of the matter before he went across to the house, doubting whether it would not be better to let Julia go without troubling her with a further interview. But he had not then seen even Lady Clavering since the tidings of her bereavement had come, and he felt that it would not be well that he should let his cousin's widow leave Clavering without offering her his sympathy. And it might be better, also, that he should see Julia once again, if only that he might show himself capable of meeting her without the exhibition of any peculiar emotion. He went, therefore, to the house, and having inquired for Lady Clavering, saw both the sisters together. He soon found that the presence of the younger one was a relief to him. Lady Clavering was so sad, and so peevish in her sadness — so broken-spirited, so far as yet from recognizing the great enfranchisement that had come to her, that with her alone he would have found himself almost unable to express the sympathy which he felt. But with Lady Ongar he had no difficulty. Lady Ongar, her sister being with them in the room, talked to him easily, as though there had never been anything between them to make conversation difficult. That all words between them should, on such an occasion as this, be sad, was a matter of course; but it seemed to Harry that Julia had freed herself from all the effects of that feeling which had existed between them, and that it would become him to do this as effectually as she had done it. Such an idea, at least, was in his mind for a moment; but when he left her she spoke one word which dispelled it. "Harry," she said, "you must ask Miss Burton to come across and see me. I hear that she is to be at the rectory tomorrow." Harry of course said that he would send her. "She will understand why I can not go to her, as I should do — but for poor Hermy's position. You will explain this, Harry." Harry, blushing up to his forehead, declared that Florence would require no explanation, and that she would certainly make the visit as proposed. "I wish to see

her, Harry — so much. And if I do not see her now, I may never have another chance.”

It was nearly a week after this that Florence went across to the great house with Mrs. Clavering and Fanny. I think that she understood the nature of the visit she was called upon to make, and no doubt she trembled much at the coming ordeal. She was going to see her great rival — her rival, who had almost been preferred to her — nay, who had been preferred to her for some short space of time, and whose claims as to beauty and wealth were so greatly superior to her own. And this woman whom she was to see had been the first love of the man whom she now regarded as her own, and would have been about to be his wife at this moment had it not been for her own treachery to him. Was she so beautiful as people said? Florence, in the bottom of her heart, wished that she might have been saved from this interview.

The three ladies from the rectory found the two ladies at the great house sitting together in the small drawing room. Florence was so confused that she could hardly bring herself to speak to Lady Clavering, or so much as look at Lady Ongar. She shook hands with the elder sister, and knew that her hand was then taken by the other. Julia at first spoke a very few words to Mrs. Clavering, and Fanny sat herself down beside Hermione. Florence took a chair at a little distance, and was left there for a few minutes without notice. For this she was very thankful, and by degrees was able to fix her eyes on the face of the woman whom she so feared to see, and yet on whom she so desired to look. Lady Clavering was a mass of ill-arranged widow's weeds. She had assumed in all its grotesque ugliness those paraphernalia of outward woe which women have been condemned to wear, in order that for a time they may be shorn of all the charms of their sex. Nothing could be more proper or unbecoming than the heavy, drooping, shapeless blackness in which Lady Clavering had enveloped herself. But Lady Ongar, though also a widow, though as yet a widow of not twelve months' standing, was dressed — in weeds, no doubt, but in weeds which had been so cultivated that they were as good as flowers. She was very beautiful. Florence owned to herself as she sat there in silence, that Lady Ongar was the most beautiful woman she had ever seen. But hers was not the beauty by which, as she would have thought, Harry Clavering would have been attracted. Lady Ongar's form, bust, and face were, at this period of her life, almost majestic, whereas the softness and grace of womanhood were the charms which Harry loved. He had sometimes said to Florence that, to his taste, Cecilia Burton was almost perfect as a woman; and there could be no contrast greater than that between Cecilia Burton and Lady Ongar. But Florence did not remember that the Julia Brabazon of three

years since had not been the same as the Lady Ongar whom now she saw.

When they had been there some minutes Lady Ongar came and sat beside Florence, moving her seat as though she were doing the most natural thing in the world. Florence's heart came to her mouth, but she made a resolution that she would, if possible, bear herself well. "You have been at Clavering before, I think," said Lady Ongar. Florence said that she had been at the parsonage during the last Easter. "Yes, I heard that you dined here with my brother-in-law." This she said in a low voice, having seen that Lady Clavering was engaged with Fanny and Mrs. Clavering. "Was it not terribly sudden?"

"Terribly sudden," said Florence.

"The two brothers! Had you not met Captain Clavering?"

"Yes; he was here when I dined with your sister."

"Poor fellow! Is it not odd that they should have gone, and that their friend, whose yacht it was, should have been saved? They say, however, that Mr. Stuart behaved admirably, begging his friends to get into the boat first. He stayed by the vessel when the boat was carried away, and he was saved in that way. But he meant to do the best he could for them. There's no doubt of that."

"But how dreadful his feelings must be!"

"Men do not think so much of these things as we do. They have so much more to employ their minds. Don't you think so?" Florence did not at the moment quite know what she thought about men's feelings, but said that she supposed that such was the case. "But I think that, after all, they are juster than we are," continued Lady Ongar — "juster and truer, though not so tender-hearted. Mr. Stuart, no doubt, would have been willing to drown himself to save his friends, because the fault was in some degree his. I don't know that I should have been able to do so much."

"In such a moment, it must have been so difficult to think of what ought to be done."

"Yes, indeed; and there is but little good in speculating upon it now. You know this place, do you not — the house, I mean, and the gardens?"

"Not very well." Florence, as she answered this question, began again to tremble. "Take a turn with me, and I will show you the garden. My hat and cloak are in the hall." Then Florence got up to accompany her, trembling very much inwardly. "Miss Burton and I are going out for a few minutes," said Lady Ongar, addressing herself to Mrs. Clavering. "We will not keep you waiting very long."

"We are in no hurry," said Mrs. Clavering. Then Florence was carried off, and found herself alone with her conquered rival.

"Not that there is much to show you," said Lady Ongar — "indeed nothing; but the place must be of more interest to you than to anyone else, and if you are fond of that sort of thing, no doubt you will make it all that is charming."

"I am very fond of a garden," said Florence.

"I don't know whether I am. Alone, by myself I think I should care nothing for the prettiest Eden in all England. I don't think I would care for a walk through the Elysian fields by myself. I am a chameleon, and take the color of those with whom I live. My future colors will not be very bright, as I take it. It's a gloomy place enough, is it not? But there are fine trees, you see, which are the only things which one can not by any possibility command. Given good trees, taste and money may do anything very quickly, as I have no doubt you'll find."

"I don't suppose I shall have much to do with it — at present."

"I should think that you will have everything to do with it. There, Miss Burton, I brought you here to show you this very spot, and to make to you my confession here, and to get from you, here, one word of confidence, if you will give it me." Florence was trembling now outwardly as well as inwardly. "You know my story — as far, I mean, as I had a story once, in conjunction with Harry Clavering?"

"I think I do," said Florence.

"I am sure you do," said Lady Ongar. "He has told me that you do, and what he says is always true. It was here, on this spot, that I gave him back his troth to me, and told him that I would have none of his love, because he was poor. That is barely two years ago. Now he is poor no longer. Now, had I been true to him, a marriage with him would have been, in a prudential point of view, all that any woman could desire. I gave up the dearest heart, the sweetest temper, aye, and the truest man that, that — Well, you have won him instead, and he has been the gainer. I doubt whether I ever should have made him happy, but I know that you will do so. It was just here that I parted from him."

"He has told me of that parting," said Florence.

"I am sure he has. And, Miss Burton, if you will allow me to say one word further — do not be made to think any ill of him because of what happened the other day."

"I think no ill of him," said Florence, proudly.

"That is well. But I am sure you do not. You are not one to think evil, as I take it, of any body, much less of him whom you love. When he saw me again, free as I am, and when I saw him, thinking him also to be free, was it strange that some memory of old days should come back upon us? But the fault, if fault there has been, was mine."

"I have never said that there was any fault."

"No, Miss Burton, but others have said so. No doubt I am foolish to talk to you in this way, and I have not yet said that which I desired to say. It is simply this — that I do not begrudge you your happiness. I wished the same happiness to be mine, but it is not mine. It might have been, but I forfeited it. It is past, and I will pray that you may enjoy it long. You will not refuse to receive my congratulations?"

"Indeed I will not."

"Or to think of me as a friend of your husband's?"

"Oh no."

"That is all, then. I have shown you the gardens, and now we may go in. Some day, perhaps, when you are Lady Paramount here, and your children are running about the place, I may come again to see them — if you and he will have me."

"I hope you will, Lady Ongar. In truth I hope so."

"It is odd enough that I said to him once that I would never go to Clavering Park again till I went there to see his wife. That was long before those two brothers perished — before I had ever heard of Florence Burton. And yet, indeed, it was not very long ago. It was since my husband died. But that was not quite true, for here I am, and he has not yet got a wife. But it was odd, was it not?"

"I can not think what should have made you say that."

"A spirit of prophecy comes on one sometimes, I suppose. Well, shall we go in? I have shown you all the wonders of the garden, and told you all the wonders connected with it of which I know aught. No doubt there would be other wonders more wonderful, if one could ransack the private history of all the Claverings for the last hundred years. I hope, Miss Burton, that any marvels which may attend your career here may be happy marvels." She then took Florence by the hand, and, drawing close to her, stooped over and kissed her. "You will think me a fool, of course," said she, "but I do not care for that." Florence now was in tears, and could make no answer in words; but she pressed the hand which she still held, and then followed her companion back into the house. After that the visit was soon brought to an end, and the three ladies from the rectory returned across the park to their house.

Chapter *LII*

Conclusion

*F*lorence Burton had taken upon herself to say that Mrs. Clavering would have no difficulty in making to Mr. Saul the communication which was now needed before he could be received at the rectory, as the rector's successor and future son-in-law; but Mrs. Clavering was by no means so confident of her own powers. To her it seemed as though the undertaking which she had in hand was one surrounded with difficulties. Her husband, when the matter was being discussed, at once made her understand that he would not relieve her by an offer to perform the task. He had been made to break the bad news to Lady Clavering, and, having been submissive in that matter, felt himself able to stand aloof altogether as to this more difficult embassy. "I suppose it would hardly do to ask Harry to see him again," Mrs. Clavering had said. "You would do it much better, my dear," the rector had replied. Then Mrs. Clavering had submitted in her turn; and when the scheme was fully matured, and the time had come in which the making of the proposition could no longer be delayed with prudence, Mr. Saul was summoned by a short note. "Dear Mr. Saul: — If you are disengaged, would you come to me at the rectory at eleven tomorrow? Yours ever, M. C." Mr. Saul of course said that he would come. When the tomorrow had arrived and breakfast was over, the rector and Harry took themselves off somewhere about the grounds of the great house, counting up their treasures of proprietorship, as we can fancy that men so circumstanced would do, while Mary Fielding, with Fanny and Florence, retired up stairs, so that they might be well out of the way. They knew, all of them, what was about to be done, and Fanny behaved herself like a white lamb, decked with bright ribbons for the sacrificial altar. To her it was a sacrificial morning — very sacred, very solemn, and very trying to the nerves.

"I don't think that any girl was ever in such a position before," she said to her sister.

"A great many girls would be glad to be in the same position," Mrs. Fielding replied.

"Do you think so? To me there is something almost humiliating in the idea that he should be asked to take me."

"Fiddlestick, my dear," replied Mrs. Fielding.

Mr. Saul came, punctual as the church clock, of which he had the regulating himself and was shown into the rectory dining room, where Mrs. Clavering was sitting alone. He looked, as he ever did, serious, composed, ill-dressed, and like a gentleman. Of course he must have supposed that the present rector would make some change in his mode of living, and could not be surprised that he should have been summoned to the rectory; but he was surprised that the summons should have come from Mrs. Clavering, and not from the rector himself. It appeared to him that the old enmity must be very enduring if, even now, Mr. Clavering could not bring himself to see his curate on a matter of business.

"It seems a long time since we have seen you here, Mr. Saul," said Mrs. Clavering.

"Yes; when I have remembered how often I used to be here, my absence has seemed long and strange."

"It has been a source of great grief to me."

"And to me, Mrs. Clavering."

"But, as circumstances then were, in truth it could not be avoided. Common prudence made it necessary. Don't you think so, Mr. Saul?"

"If you ask me, I must answer according to my own ideas. Common prudence should not have made it necessary — at least not according to my view of things. Common prudence, with different people, means such different things! But I am not going to quarrel with your ideas of common prudence, Mrs. Clavering."

Mrs. Clavering had begun badly, and was aware of it. She should have said nothing about the past. She had foreseen, from the first, the danger of doing so, but had been unable to rush at once into the golden future. "I hope we shall have no more quarreling, at any rate," she said.

"There shall be none on my part. Only, Mrs. Clavering, you must not suppose, from my saying so, that I intend to give up my pretensions. A word from your daughter would make me do so, but no words from anyone else."

"She ought to be very proud of such constancy on your part, Mr. Saul, and I have no doubt she will be." Mr. Saul did not understand this, and made no reply to it. "I don't know whether you have heard that Mr. Clavering intends to — give up the living."

"I have not heard it. I have thought it probable that he would do so."

"He has made up his mind that he will. The fact is that if he held it, he must neglect either that or the property." We will not stop at this moment to examine what Mr. Saul's ideas must have been as to the exigencies of the property, which would leave no time for the performance of such clerical duties as had fallen for some years past to the share of the rector himself. "He hopes that he may be allowed to take some part in the services, but he means to resign the living."

"I suppose that will not much affect me for the little time that I have to remain."

"We think it will affect you, and hope that it may. Mr. Clavering wishes you to accept the living."

"To accept the living?" And for a moment even Mr. Saul looked as though he were surprised.

"Yes, Mr. Saul."

"To be rector of Clavering?"

"If you see no objection to such an arrangement."

"It is a most munificent offer, but as strange as it is munificent. Unless, indeed —" And then some glimpse of the truth made its way into the chinks of Mr. Saul's mind.

"Mr. Clavering would, no doubt, have made the offer to you himself had it not been that I can, perhaps, speak to you about dear Fanny better than he could. Though our prudence has not been quite to your mind, you can, at any rate, understand that we might very much object to her marrying you when there was nothing for you to live on, even though we had no objection to yourself personally."

"But Mr. Clavering did object on both grounds."

"I was not aware that he had done so; but if so, no such objection is now made by him — or by me. My idea is that a child should be allowed to consult her own heart, and to indulge her own choice, provided that in doing so she does not prepare for herself a life of indigence, which must be a life of misery; and of course providing also that there be no strong personal objection."

"A life of indigence need not be a life of misery," said Mr. Saul, with that obstinacy which formed so great a part of his character.

"Well, well."

"I am very indigent, but I am not at all miserable. If we are to be made miserable by that, what is the use of all our teaching?"

"But, at any rate a competence is comfortable."

"Too comfortable!" As Mr. Saul made this exclamation, Mrs. Clavering could not but wonder at her daughter's taste. But the matter had gone too far now for any possibility of receding.

"You will not refuse it, I hope, as it will be accompanied by what you say you still desire."

"No, I will not refuse it. And may God give her and me grace so to use the riches of this world that they become not a stumbling-block to us, and a rock of offence. It is possible that the camel should be made to go through the needle's eye. It is possible."

"The position, you know, is not one of great wealth."

"It is to me, who have barely hitherto had the means of support. Will you tell your husband from me that I will accept, and endeavor not to betray the double trust he proposes to confer on me? It is much that he should give to me his daughter. She shall be to me bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh. If God will give me his grace thereto, I will watch over her, so that no harm shall come nigh her. I love her as the apple of my eye; and I am thankful — very thankful that the rich gift should be made to me."

"I am sure that you love her, Mr. Saul."

"But," continued he, not marking her interruption, "that other trust is one still greater, and requiring a more tender care and even a closer sympathy. I shall feel that the souls of these people will be, as it were, in my hand, and that I shall be called upon to give an account of their welfare. I will strive — I will strive. And she, also, will be with me to help me."

When Mrs. Clavering described this scene to her husband, he shook his head, and there came over his face a smile, in which there was much of melancholy, as he said, "Ah I yes, that is all very well now. He will settle down as other men do, I suppose, when he has four or five children around him." Such were the ideas which the experience of the outgoing and elder clergyman taught him to entertain as to the ecstatic piety of his younger brother.

It was Mrs. Clavering who suggested to Mr. Saul that perhaps he would like to see Fanny. This she did when her story had been told, and he was preparing to leave her. "Certainly, if she will come to me."

"I will make no promise," said Mrs. Clavering, "but I will see." Then she went up stairs to the room where the girls were sitting, and the sacrificial lamb was sent down into the drawing room. "I suppose, if you say so, mamma —"

"I think, my dear, that you had better see him. You will meet then more comfortably afterward." So Fanny went into the drawing room, and Mr. Saul was sent to her there. What passed between them all readers of these pages will understand. Few young ladies, I fear, will envy Fanny Clavering her lover; but they will remember that Love will still be lord

of all, and they will acknowledge that he had done much to deserve the success in life which had come in his way.

It was long before the old rector could reconcile himself either to the new rector or his new son-in-law. Mrs. Clavering had now so warmly taken up Fanny's part, and had so completely assumed a mother's interest in her coming marriage, that Mr. Clavering, or Sir Henry, as we may now call him, had found himself obliged to abstain from repeating to her the wonder with which he still regarded his daughter's choice. But to Harry he could still be eloquent on the subject. "Of course it's all right now," he said. "He's a very good young man, and nobody would work harder in the parish. I always thought I was very lucky to have such an assistant; but, upon my word, I can not understand Fanny — I can not, indeed."

"She has been taken by the religious side of her character," said Harry.

"Yes, of course. And no doubt it is very gratifying to me to see that she thinks so much of religion. It should be the first consideration with all of us at all times. But she has never been used to men like Mr. Saul."

"Nobody can deny that he is a gentleman."

"Yes, he is a gentleman; God forbid that I should say he was not, especially now that he is going to marry your sister. But — I don't know whether you quite understand what I mean."

"I think I do. He isn't quite one of our sort."

"How on earth she can ever have brought herself to look at him in that light?"

"There's no accounting for tastes, sir. And, after all, as he's to have the living, there will be nothing to regret."

"No, nothing to regret. I suppose he'll be up at the other house occasionally? I never could make anything of him when he dined at the rectory; perhaps he'll be better there. Perhaps, when he's married, he'll get into the way of drinking a glass of wine like any body else. Dear Fanny, I hope she'll be happy. That's everything." In answer to this, Harry took upon himself to assure his father that Fanny would be happy; and then they changed the conversation, and discussed the alterations which they would make in reference to the preservation of pheasants.

Mr. Saul and Fanny remained long together on that occasion, and when they parted he went off about his work, not saying a word to any other person in the house, and she betook herself as fast as her feet could carry her to her own room.

She said not a word either to her mother, or to her sister, or to Florence as to what had passed at that interview; but, when she was first seen by any of them, she was very grave in her demeanor, and very silent.

When her father congratulated her, which he did with as much cordiality as he was able to assume, she kissed him, and thanked him for his care and kindness; but even this she did almost solemnly. "Ah! I see how it is to be," said the old rector to his wife. "There are to be no more cakes and ale in the parish." Then his wife reminded him of what he himself had said of the change which would take place in Mr. Saul's ways when he should have a lot of children running about his feet. "Then I can only hope that they'll begin to run about very soon," said the old rector.

To her sister, Mary Fielding, Fanny said little or nothing of her coming marriage, but to Florence, who, as regarded that event, was in the same position as herself, she frequently did express her feelings, declaring how awful to her was the responsibility of the thing she was about to do. "Of course that's quite true," said Florence, "but it doesn't make one doubt that one is right to marry."

"I don't know," said Fanny. "When I think of it, it almost makes me doubt."

"Then, if I were Mr. Saul, I would not let you think of it at all."

"Ah! that shows that you do not understand him. He would be the first to advise me to hesitate if he thought that — that — that — I don't know that I can quite express what I mean." "Under those circumstances Mr. Saul won't think that — that —"

"Oh, Florence, it is too serious for laughing — it is, indeed." Then Florence also hoped that a time might come, and that shortly, in which Mr. Saul might moderate his views, though she did not express herself exactly as the rector had done.

Immediately after this Florence went back to Stratton in order that she might pass what remained to her of her freedom with her mother and father, and that she might prepare herself for her wedding. The affair with her was so much hurried that she had hardly time to give her mind those considerations which were weighing so heavily on Fanny's mind. It was felt by all the Burtons, especially by Cecilia, that there was need for extension of their views in regard to millinery, seeing that Florence was to marry the eldest son and heir of a baronet. And old Mrs. Burton was awed almost into acquiescence by the reflections which came upon her when she thought of the breakfast, and of the presence of Sir Henry Clavering. She at once summoned her daughter-in-law from Ramsgate to her assistance, and felt that all her experience, gathered from the wedding breakfasts of so many elder daughters, would hardly carry her through the difficulties of the present occasion.

The two widowed sisters were still at the great house when Sir Henry Clavering, with Harry and Fanny, went to Stratton, but they left it on the following day. The father and son went up together to bid them

farewell, on the eve of their departure, and to press upon them, over and over again, the fact that they were still to regard the Claverings of Clavering Park as their nearest relations and friends. The eldest sister simply cried when this was said to her — cried easily with plenteous tears, till the weeds which enveloped her seemed to be damp from the ever-running fountain. Hitherto to weep had been her only refuge; but I think that even this had already become preferable to her former life. Lady Ongar assured Sir Henry, or Mr. Clavering, as he was still called till after their departure, that she would always remember and accept his kindness. "And you will come to us?" said he. "Certainly; when I can make Hermy come. She will be better when the Summer is here. And then after that, we will think about it." On this occasion she seemed to be quite cheerful herself, and bade Harry farewell with all the frank affection of an old friend.

"I have given up the house in Bolton Street," she said to him.

"And where do you mean to live?"

"Anywhere; just as it may suit Hermy. What difference does it make? We are going to Tenby now, and though Tenby seems to me to have as few attractions as anyplace I ever knew, I dare say we shall stay there, simply because we shall be there. That consideration weighs most with such old women as we. Good-bye, Harry."

"Good-bye, Julia. I hope I may yet see you — you and Hermy, happy before long."

"I don't know much about happiness, Harry. There comes a dream of it sometimes — such as you have got now. But I will answer for this — you shall never hear of my being downhearted — at least not on my own account," she added, in a whisper. "Poor Hermy may sometimes drag me down; but I will do my best. And, Harry, tell your wife I shall write to her occasionally — once a year, or something like that, so that she need not be afraid. Good-bye, Harry." "Good-bye, Julia." And so they parted.

Immediately on her arrival at Tenby, Lady Ongar communicated to Mr. Turnbull her intention of giving back to the Courton family not only the place called Ongar Park, but also the whole of her income with the exception of eight hundred a year, so that in that respect she might be equal to her sister. This brought Mr. Turnbull down to Tenby, and there was interview after interview between the countess and the lawyer. The proposition, however, was made to the Courtons, and was absolutely refused by them. Ongar Park was accepted on behalf of the mother of the present earl; but as regarded the money, the widow of the late earl was assured by the elder surviving brother that no one doubted her right to it, or would be a party to accepting it from her. "Then," said Lady

Ongar, "it will accumulate in my hands, and I can leave it as I please in my will."

"As to that, no one can control you," said her brother-in-law, who went to Tenby to see her; "but you must not be angry if I advise you not to make any such resolution. Such hoards never have good results." This good result, however, did come from the effort which the poor broken-spirited woman was making — an intimacy, and at last a close friendship, was formed between her and the relatives of her deceased lord.

And now my story is done. My readers will easily understand what would be the future life of Harry Clavering and his wife after the completion of that tour in Italy and the birth of the heir, the preparations for which made the tour somewhat shorter than Harry had intended. His father, of course, gave up to him the shooting, and the farming of the home farm, and, after a while, the management of the property. Sir Henry preached occasionally — believing himself able to preach much oftener than he did — and usually performed some portion of the morning service. "Oh yes," said Theodore Burton in answer to some comfortable remark from his wife, "Providence has done very well for Florence. And Providence has done very well for him also; but Providence was making a great mistake when he expected him to earn his bread."

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